

A Magazine of Indian Thought

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# THE eye

A. WRITTEN. WORD. MOVEMENT



- Ken Wilber-Biographer of Consciousness
- Where Are We Going?
- Recalling Gandhi
- Ah Ganesh!
- Sugatha Kumari-An Interview

## Havelis Of Lakshmangarh Rajasthan, North West India



**I**n 1805, Lakshmansingh, son of the Rao Sikar built a remarkable for in the Shekhavati region of Rajasthan. Gradually it became a prosperous market town, well known for its traders and old *havelis* which are not just characteristic of desert courtyard houses, but unique in themselves for their wall paintings and more.

In the month of May and June, the sun is harsh and the hot low winds sweep the desert. Yet the streets and bazaars are active. The houses are packed close together and shade the street.

*Havelis*, mostly square in plan, have an outer wall which is like a protective curtain. Since it is built in thick stone masonry and has very few openings it acts as a neat sink. Towards the street the plinth extends outwards to form a sitting platform. *Chajjas* or balconies project over to the street below. The monotony of a windowless wall, however, is hidden with the help of wall paintings.

The living spaces are lined along the inside of the curtain wall and open into a semi-covered verandah and then directly into a central courtyard which is open to the sky. Not only does the house breathe through this device but it helps to maintain a comfortable temperature at all times inside the enclosure. The entrance to the house does not open directly into the

courtyard but into a *baithak* for visitors first. The courtyard thus assumes a more private nature.

The *havelis* of Lakshmangarh are unique in the sense that the architectural elements like doors, door frames, columns, overhangs, brackets, balconies, *jalis* are all made in stone and not wood as is the common practice.

The wall paintings are virtual reflections of Lakshmangarh history, myths and beliefs. Settlers brought with them their images of warriors, British women, their gramophones, peacocks, Indian flags, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, deities and geometrical designs.

The prosperous 'Seths', the Modis and the Birlas, have since then moved out of Lakshmangarh all over India. Most of these *haveli* owners now live elsewhere. All one hears are the pigeons or the

chowkidar shouting, "jagte raho" (stay alert).

सेठ बसे कलकत्ता - बम्बई दिब्रुगढ़ आसाम  
चाकर छिड़ें बैठिया, बैठिया काटे उमर तमाम ।  
कुण सूं मूजरा करे हवेल्या बरबा मिले वाम,  
बाट इली जीवे आवण बी, मोसै ऊबी शाम ।

(The Seth has settled in Calcutta, Bombay, Dibrugarh, Assam and the servant will spend his life sitting at the doorstep. Whom should these buildings standing for years welcome? They are waiting for someone to come.)

Source: *Lakshmangarh Samdarshika*

Ripin Kalra

Photographs: T.V.B. School of Habitat Studies





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BOOK REVIEW



Dear Editor,

The *Seed Yatra* issue certainly includes a lot of information and points of view. My own view is based upon a 19th century European theory which was developed by Romantic environmentalists in response to the industrial revolution, called the 'Garden City'. It was never put into practice, but I think it still makes sense. Like traditional Hindus, 19th century Romantics were appalled by the unnaturalness of the industrialised city which was just then beginning; as also by the split between rural and urban life. They also disliked the pollution in the industrialised cities. What the Garden City was, was a concept of small communities which would include culture, clean technology and connection with the surrounding agricultural land. There was also an environmental concern with preserving any natural habitat in the area.

This idea would be appropriate for the development of India today for a number of reasons. For one, Sharon LaPalme and Ruppreet Singh state that three-fourths of India is still rural. At the same time, the cities, they report, are expanding further and further. And, as Ms. Bhavanani describes, the cities are quite smoggy. The lure of the city is apparently a combination of culture, technology, money and more modern

and free social values. My own belief, as a Romantic, is that it is desirable to preserve traditional culture while introducing modern technology to be used selectively by the free choice of the people and to attempt to combat archaic taboos with modern, civil libertarian ideas. The Garden City could be all these things, especially with the help of modern communications technology, including the computer. Urban sprawl is, in fact, *passé*. The computer makes high-tech decentralisation possible. Rural areas could become small centres of culture, mixing both traditional and modern ideas and technology to the local rural population.

Within this context, I would like to express a few other opinions. I agree with Devinder Sharma about free trade. I think it's a good thing. It's not GATT in itself that's evil. But the government must co-operate with the people, rather than with multinationals **against** the people. This brings me to another point. The country needs a truly liberal agrarian party. Prof. Nanjundaswamy seems to be moving in that direction. As a socialist, he sees the need for a mixed economy in India, combining free market with a government commitment to serving the needs of the people. For example, as Sharma, Ashish Kothari and Vandana Shiva all discuss, corporations that do research on new types of food plants and animals tend to patent them. This would seem to call for government research to find high yield crops suitable for India. My own Romantic belief is that the ancient methods of selective breeding and hybridisation should be used as being more natural, but done scientifically

for maximum development as quickly and efficiently as possible. I don't think genetic engineering is really useful in agriculture, though it is probably justified in medicine to save human life. I agree with those writers who advocated maintaining India's wide variety of native foods, but at the same time. I think it's good that India has also made many foods from around the world its own, and I see nothing wrong with adding strawberries to the list. Certainly, Indians should be made aware that traditional diets are more healthy than processed foods. Research could develop the most natural methods possible that could feed the country. Of course, the corporations don't do research with naturalness as a goal!

Elliot Cantsin,  
N Merrick,  
New York,  
USA.

Dear Editor,

Your *Seed Yatra* issue was excellent and has a variety of fine articles. The seed-tree-fruit-seed cycle mentioned in T.S. Anantha's article is, of course, a challenging concept.

What is kind of agitating my mind the last few months is the fact that the seed of the present contains in itself not only the future tree, but also millions of generations of trees by the cycle of tree-seed-tree ad infinitum. All trees and animals follow this scheme. Every living thing throws its shadow (or light) into the future without being aware of it in the least. This is a mind-boggling thought.

Brig. R.B. Nayar,  
Kochi,  
Kerala.

**Errata:** In the last issue Vol III No.1 (*Seed Yatra*), the book review of *Monographs on Vrksayurveda* mentioned the price as Rs. 50/- per monograph. However, this price is not uniform for all monographs. For more information, please contact: Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems, 2, 25th East Street, Thiruvananthapuram, Madras-600041 (Tel: 415909).

In *Vrksayurveda - Basket of Choices* Dr K. Vijayalakshmi's designation was mentioned as Deputy Director, Sri Chakra Foundation. She is Deputy Director, Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems, Madras. The error is regretted.

*THE EYE* is fourteen issues old. Fourteen is a difficult age you will all agree, impetuous and rebellious. Screaming for liberation from parental autocracy. Ignore it for a while but you can't ignore it forever. Free me from the shackles of a 'theme' it screamed, I want to be a mixed bag, an assortment, for a change. So, we the beleaguered parents of this journal had to change the format of this issue from the regular theme based edit to a more free-float mode. Only every once in a while, we warned. We can't be too whimsical can we?

The fact of the matter is that several writers had sent in their pieces and we couldn't find the appropriate space to fit them all in. So, it is with a certain sense of relief that we have decided to de-theme ourselves in this issue. We do hope our readers are happy with the idea, albeit a temporary one.

The articles in this issue, therefore, touch upon a variety of subjects and, as always, our writers have excelled themselves. In an exposition, which I can only call brilliant, A.V. Ashok deals with the theme of the 'evolution of the spirit' - a matter quite left out in the Darwinian journey. For this expose, he has chosen the works of Ken Wilber, a bright young American, a twentieth century psychological iconoclast, who explores the more uncharted territories of the soul rather than the ego. The study, quite simply, places side by side, the facets of western analytical psychology and the higher reaches of the soul.

Gandhi is a subject, not a person. Raghava Menon elucidates why the man is a towering structure of moral calibre and what it was that gave him the moral authority to be a symbol maker. An interview with the poetess, Sugatha Kumari ties in this Gandhian view firmly entrenched in her work with the environment and with the mental patients of Kerala.

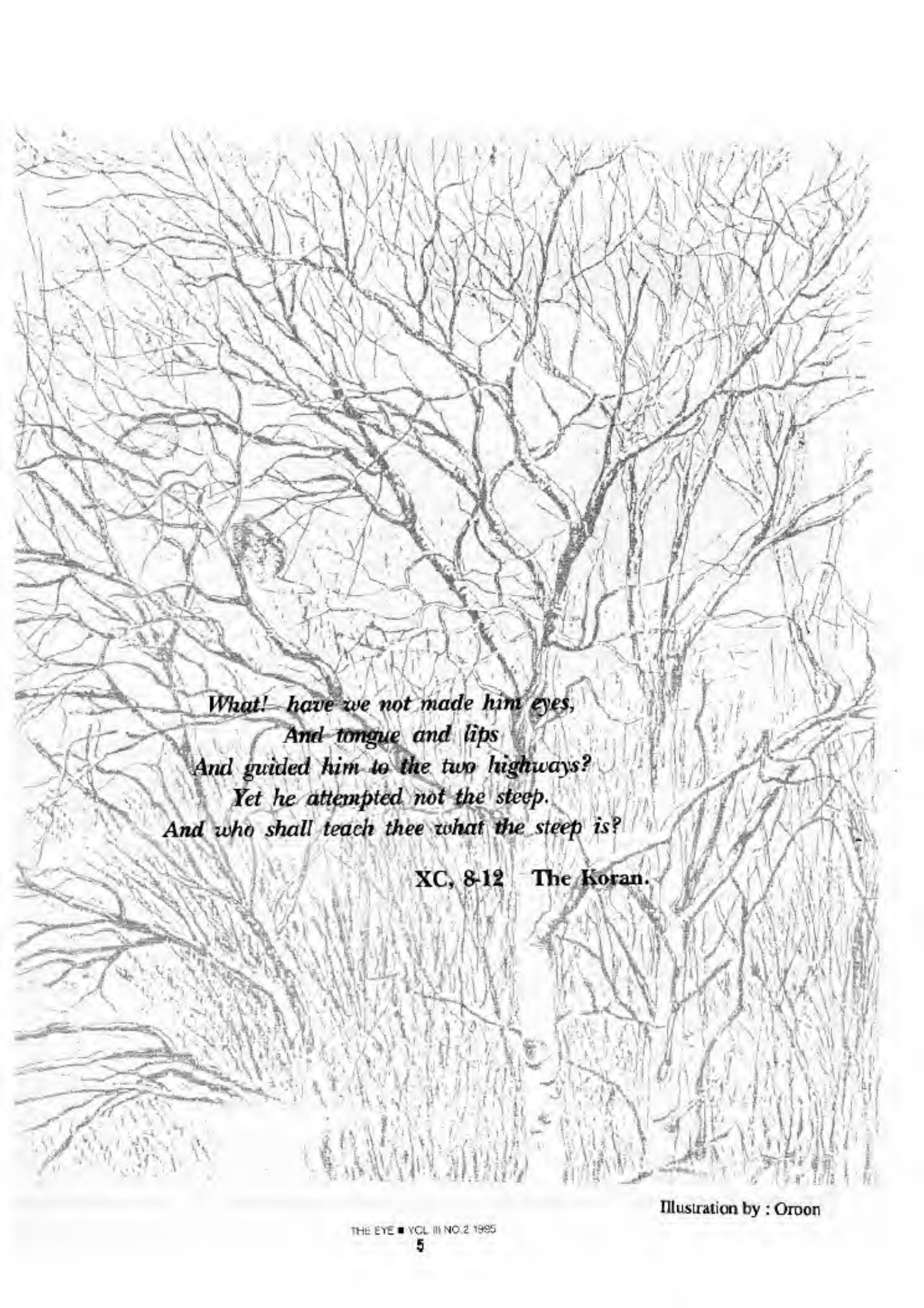
Four articles deal with concepts of violence, (both ancient and contemporary), the zeitgeist of the pleasure principle, India's dilemmas and solutions and the 'benevolence' of the reigning monarchs of multinational companies. Through literature, we explore the world of the late Ashapoorna Devi to whom this issue is dedicated. We also pay homage to that beautiful cultural component called myth with two stories from Meghalaya and Karnataka. And there is our usual fare of a lighthearted look at the world.

Through this assortment of thoughts, a 'theme' in fact emerges. That of holism in living. This is the age of reductionism and fragmentation, of experts and specialists. Of managers and the managed. How free are we really? Can we let a dominant outside paradigm subvert the quality of our lives? And finally, the question we need to ask ourselves is whether there are, in fact, neat solutions to complex problems.

*Rukmini Sekh*







*What! have we not made him eyes,  
And tongue and lips  
And guided him to the two highways?  
Yet he attempted not the steep.  
And who shall teach thee what the steep is?*

**XC, 8-12 The Koran.**

**Illustration by : Oroon**



# TRIBUTE

We dedicate this issue to  
Ashapoorna Devi.

*Nandita Mukherjee*



**T**his year's puja specials in Bengali literature will be without Ashapoorna's contribution — for the last six decades, she has been a towering star in the firmament of Bengali literature.

Born on 8 January 1909, to a conservative family of Calcutta, Ashapoorna's father, Harendranath Gupta was an artist. Formal education was denied to her as was normal in an orthodox family of those days. But her mother, Sarla Sundari had an inordinate fondness for literature to which she exposed her daughter.

A library at home and books from outside helped Ashapoorna to develop a penchant for writing. She is always known to say that her mother was the inspiration behind her literary pursuits.

She was married at fifteen to Kalidas Gupta, who worked in an office in Calcutta. She had two children, a son and a daughter. Kalidas Gupta died in 1978. It was a blow to Ashapoorna who had always enjoyed her husband's support and encouragement. Though she was, what is commonly known as a 'typical housewife', she found with Kalidas's help, time to put pen to paper after her

household chores.

At thirteen, as her literary debut, a small poem of hers's appeared in *Shishu Sathi*, a children's magazine. From then onwards there was no looking back. For two consecutive years, she wrote for another children's magazine called *Khokakhuku*.

Ashapoorna's first work for adults was *Patni-o-Preyashi* which appeared in *Ananda Bazar Patrika's* puja special in 1936. Her first publication (1941), *Choto Thakurdar Kashi Jatra*, was a collection of stories for children. Then she published a collection of short stories under the title, *Jal-aar-Agun* in 1944. Ashapoorna was a prolific writer, having written over two hundred novels and nearly a thousand short stories. She is known widely even outside Bengal through translations. At least fifty of her novels have been translated into Hindi, two novels and short stories into English. Twenty six of her novels have been filmed and six have been staged.

During her long literary career honours were heaped upon her. Calcutta University honoured her with *Leela Puroshkar* (1954) and *Bhuban Mohini Swarnapadak* (1963); *Motilal Puraskar* from *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1959); *Rabindra Smriti Puroshkar* of the West Bengal Government in (1966) and the *Bharatiya Gyanpith Award* in 1976. In the same year she was awarded the *Padmasree*. The universities of Jabalpur, Burdwan and Rabindra Bharati honoured her with a D. Litt. In 1989 she received the *Deshokattam* from Viswa Bharati University.

Ashapoorna was the Vice President of the P.E.N. branch of Calcutta, a

member of the film censor board for twelve years and was frequently featured by All India Radio and Doordarshan.

I knew Ashapoorna Devi fairly well and felt completely at home with her. She was a combination of talent and humility, intellect and simplicity, a package quite rare these days.

## ASHAPOORNA'S WORKS

Women writers appeared on the Bengali literary scene in the early 20th century. To name a few, they were Anurupa Devi, Nirupama Devi, Prabhavati Devi and Shailabala Ghoshjaya. They all wrote popular novels with stories centering around the family. The characters in their novels were idealistic, endowed with the virtues of sacrifice and selflessness. Quite contrary to their view was Ashapoorna's. She ventured into the world of the downtrodden. Commenting on her own work she wrote — 'I write about what I see around me, I do not try to sensationalise. I move around within the world I know. I feel, even within this known world there is still a lot "unknown". What we see is not all — in what we do not there lies much more — it is the truth and the conflict that waits to be revealed.' Her 'known world' is the life of the middle class Bengali family in its multi-hued entirety. Her observations, in her early life, of the helplessness of the women in these families, their deprivation, suffering, bondage and their striving thirst for freedom, influenced her earlier writings. Through it she groped for solutions.

Unlike her contemporaries, Ashapoorna never haunted coffee houses or visited factories and offices for inspiration. Largely confined within the four walls of her home she wrote with curiosity, compassion and sharpness. *Mittir Badi* (1947), *Shashibabur Sansar* (1957), *Jog Bhyog* (1960) are her well known family



# KEN WILBER

## BIOGRAPHER OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A.V.Ashok



*Our birth is but a sleep and a  
forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us,  
our life's Star  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar.....*

*William Wordsworth*

*'We all know what the 'lower' stages and levels of the psyche are like: they are instinctual, impulsive, libidinous, id-ish, animal, ape-like. And we all know what some of the middle stages are like: socially adapted, mentally adjusted, egoically integrated, syntactically organised, conceptually advanced. But are there no 'higher' stages? Is an integrated ego or autonomous individual the highest reach of consciousness in human beings? The individual ego is a marvellous high-order unity, but compared with the unity of the cosmos at large, it is a pitiful slice of holistic unity. Has nature laboured these billions of years just to bring forth this egoic mouse? ....the authentic mystic-sage represents the highest stages of human development - as far beyond the normal and average humanity as it itself is beyond apes....If we take these higher stages and add them to the lower and middle stages and levels which have been so carefully described and studied by Western psychology, we would then arrive at a fairly well balanced and comprehensive model of the spectrum of consciousness.'*

**Ken Wilber**

*In this article, Ken Wilber laments the blindness of Western psychology to 'higher states of consciousness' beyond the mental-egoic and its erroneous inclination to pathologise transpersonal experiences, to treat 'saints as insane and sages as psychotic'. Wilber asks, 'what is the nature of some of the higher and highest stages of development? What forms of unity are disclosed in the most developed souls of the human species? The author of this article makes a brilliant analysis of Wilber's argument and peels away layers of evolutionary confusion to reveal the simple core of human consciousness.'*

**D**own the decades of the twentieth century, the mystical wisdom of the East has had a hypnotic appeal for Western minds like Heinrich Zimmer, Giuseppe Tucci, Alexandra David Neel, Carl Jung, Rene Guenon, Aldous Huxley, Lama Anagarika Govinda, Alan Watts, Joseph Campbell and Fr. Bede Griffiths. Today, Ken Wilber, born in 1949, is the brightest name in the East-West encounter. His works radiate an exceptional knowledge of the Eastern spiritual traditions and his mind interweaves conceptions of the self in Eastern thought and Western psychology. Wilber has created 'spectrum psychology' which is the jewel in the crown of transpersonal psychology. He has emerged as the Einstein of consciousness research.

The Western roots of transpersonal psychology, also known as the 'fourth force' coming after Psychoanalysis, Behaviourism and Humanistic Psychology, lie in the pioneering spiritual vision of the Self of Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Abraham Maslow and Stanislav Grof. Earlier, William James in a celebrated remark observed, 'Our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, while all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different'. Transpersonal psychology postulates that the ego is 'sub-optimal' because our 'true identity' is beyond the ego and discards a limited focus on just the ego in favour of a transcendental perspective of our 'ineffable subjectivity'. This extends to the Self (*Brahman*, *Atman*, *Tao*) where by the ego is viewed as a contraction of identity, a constriction of 'no-boundary awareness' which is our 'real self'.

In *The Spectrum of Consciousness*



Ken Wilber

*A line drawn in the middle of a blank page divides it into 'right' and 'left'. Ignorant that this dividing boundary is an imposition, we mistake it to be real, assume the opposites it generates is irreconcilable and miss the underlying unity, the 'no-boundary' truth. The result of such violence ... is simply unhappiness.*

ness, Wilber advances four 'bands' or 'levels' of consciousness - the Mind Level, the Existential Level, the Ego Level and the Shadow Level. Each of these levels of consciousness in descending order is the outcome of Involution or a progressive fragmentation/reduction of the Mind Level, the Self's original identity of 'unity consciousness'. Evolution occurs when the self 'dis-identifies' with a 'lower-order-

level' and identifies with the 'next high-order emergent structure'. 'Where involution proceeded', observes Wilber, 'by successive separations and dismemberments, evolution proceeds by successive unifications and higher-order wholes. Where involution proceeded by successive forgetting or amnesia, evolution proceeds by successive remembering or anamnesis (Plato's 'remembrance', Sufi *dhikr*, Hindu *smara*, Buddha's 'recollection' etc.) Further.... to remember is really to re-member or join again in higher unity.' According to Wilber, each of the schools of Western psychology (like Freudian, Jungian, Existential, Humanistic and Gestalt), has 'zeroed in on one major band or level of the spectrum'. It is not different schools forming different theories about one level of consciousness, but different schools each predominantly addressing a different level of the spectrum'. The self's recovery of its lost wholeness begins with the integration of persona and shadow into a healthy ego (Psychoanalysis), then enlarges into the re-owning of the body by the ego into an existential organism (Gestalt and Humanistic Psychology) and culminates in the organism embracing the All in non-duality which is the 'suchness' of the self (Advaita Vedanta, Mahayana Buddhism, Zen).

Almost an appendix to the *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, Wilber's *No Boundary* is an enquiry into the puzzle: 'Have you ever wondered why life comes in opposites?' Reality is unity. But we experience it as a split into innumerable

pairs of opposites. For example, a line drawn in the middle of a blank page divides it into 'right' and 'left'. Ignorant that this dividing boundary is an imposition, we mistake it to be real, assume



Aldous Huxley

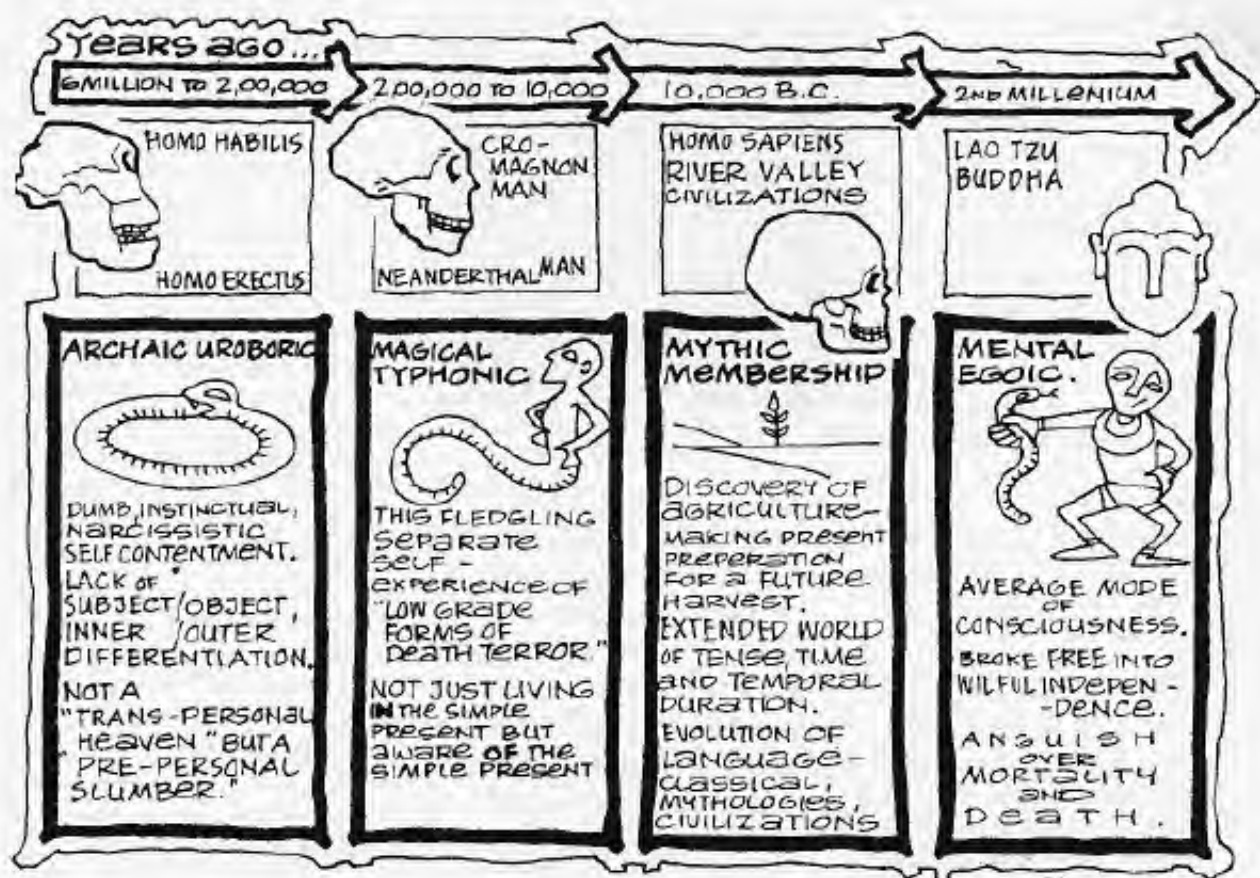


Joseph Campbell



Abraham Maslow





RIPINKALPA

*Wilber views evolution as the 'return of Spirit to Spirit via development'.*

the opposites it generates is irreconcilable and miss the underlying unity, the 'no-boundary' truth. The result of such violence ... is simply unhappiness. Life becomes suffering, full of battles. The war of opposites, observes Wilber, 'is a symptom of a boundary taken to be real, and to cure the symptoms we must go to the root of the matter itself: our illusory boundaries ... In all mystical traditions the world over, one who sees through the illusion of opposites is called 'liberated'.

Wilber's *Up From Eden* is a classic. A dazzling mix of anthropology, psychology, mythology and mysticism, *Up From Eden*, constructs a history of consciousness in relation to human evolution.

Wilber observes that over a span of six million years, four types of consciousness have prevailed: the archaic-

*In all mystical traditions the world over, one who sees through the illusion of opposites is called 'liberated'.*

uroboric, the magical typhonic, the mythic membership and the mental-egoic. In the archaic-uroboric consciousness, which prevailed from roughly six million years ago to 2,00,000 years ago (homo habilis and homo erectus), self and nature were undifferentiated - a condition of total subconscious and instinctual embeddedness in nature. 'Uroboros' is the primordial mythic symbol of the serpent eating its own tail and aptly signifies dumb instinctual narcissistic self-containment. Uroboric Dawn Man was utterly atemporal; he merely lived in the simple

present but was not even aware of it. Wilber refers to uroboric sub-consciousness as 'Eden', and notes that the uroboric lack of subject/object, inner/outer differentiation was not a 'trans-personal heaven' but a mere 'pre-personal slumber'.

The magical-typhonic consciousness which prevailed from 2,00,000 years ago 10,000 years ago (the time of the Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon man) involved a faint differentiation from nature but a lack of distinction between self and the body. The magical-typhonic consciousness was a 'body-self'. This fledgling separate self was the first to experience the dawn of some 'low grade forms of death terror' since dread of extinction goes hand in hand with separate existence. The 'typhon' in mythology is half human, half serpent and therefore is a fit symbol for the first

differentiation from the uroboric sub-conscious instinct. As for the mode of time of the magical-typhonic consciousness: 'The typhon was not just living *in* the simple present like his ancestors, he was aware *of* the simple present....' But nothing beyond the simple present was experienced: '.... the primitive hunters and gatherers of typhonic pre-history.... lived pretty much moment to moment or at most, day to day.... For a typhonic hunter, immortality consisted in living till tomorrow'.

Wilber reckons the discovery of agriculture around 10,000 B.C. as 'the effect or perhaps vehicle' of a new consciousness — mythic membership: 'the world of farming is the world of extended time, of making present preparations for a future harvest.... with the advent of farming men and women entered an extended world of tense, time and temporal duration, expanding their life and consciousness to include the future'. Wilber considers this new awareness of a 'tensed world' as the consequence of the evolution of language (50,000 B.C. to 10,000 B.C.). The high period of this mode of consciousness was the age of the classical mythologies and civilisations: Egyptian, Babylonian, Sumerian, Aztec-Mayan, Chinese, Indus Valley and Mycenaean.

The second millenium B.C. witnessed the emergence of the mental-



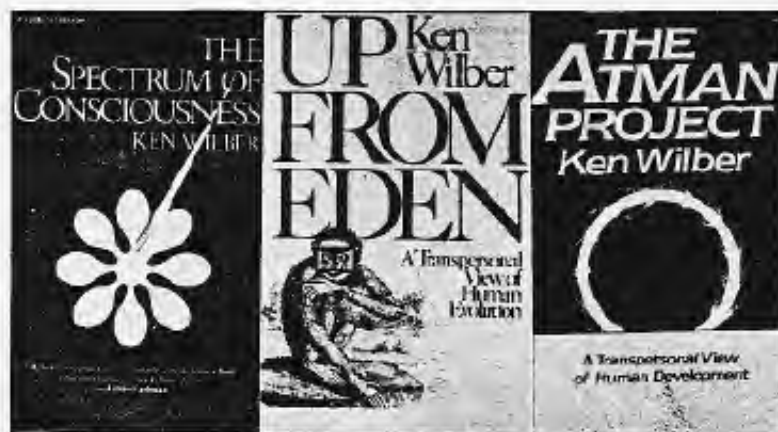
Exploring existentialist questions — stuck in the 'average mode' or the 'middle stage'.  
Woody Allen in the film *Love And Death*.

COURTESY SPAN MAGAZINE

egoic consciousness which has since continued to the present as the 'average mode' of consciousness. Consciousness now totally broke free from nature and the body into utter wilful independence. However, the ego not merely differentiated from nature and the body but lamentably 'dissociated' from both, resulting in the schism between self and nature, reason and instinct, which continue to plague us. The 'Hero Myth' at the start of the period is symbolic of the emergence of the ego. In these myths of the hero slaying a serpent-monster invariably to rescue a treasure, the serpent-mon-

ster is uroborous and the treasure it guards is the 'ego immersed and encoiled in unconsciousness'. It is with the mental-egoic mode that the first scream of anguish over mortality and death is heard. Further, from this point onwards, consciousness for the first time begins to experience the human condition 'as an insufferable state of sin, exile or delusion'. In the mental-egoic period, there have been a handful of people who have precociously 'advanced' beyond the 'average mode' of the mental egoic to the 'ultimate state of consciousness' — the 'transpersonal heaven' of return to the source in supreme enlightenment. The transpersonal consciousness of the sages of the Upanishads, the Buddha and Lao Tzu is the first of its kind and hard to find prior to the sixth century B.C.

Wilber views evolution as the 'return of Spirit to Spirit via development'. Fifteen billion years ago, 'the material cosmos blew into sole existence with the Big Bang which was really the roaring laughter of God voluntarily getting lost for the millionth time.... for the fun and sport (*leela*) of it....' Creation for Wilber is the extreme





point of Involution, 'the most alienated form of Spirit' and is called 'Original Sin' or the 'theological fall' and primal nature is a 'fall' or the *lowest* form of Spirit in its return to Spirit. 'From that point on', Wilber observes, 'evolution back to Spirit began, an evolution which produced, in the actual course of history and prehistory, successively higher-order levels— mineral, plant, lower animal, primate, man — but all were still in a state of original sin, or apparent alienation from Spirit. And around the second millenium B.C.... evolution produced the first fully conscious beings, who for just that reason, awoke to their vulnerability, separation, alienation and mortality. They did not create all that; they just became aware of all that. That was the *scientific fall*.... 'The scientific fall parallels the Biblical Fall which according to Wilber should be viewed as the 'Original Apprehension of Original Sin' and not the occurrence of Original Sin since the 'theological fall' (Original Sin) had existed for billions of years before mankind even emerged! Thus for Wilber, there has never been a 'Golden Age of real Heaven on earth' or Eden in our 'actual historic past'. Instead, given the dynamics of Evolution, a 'historical transpersonal Paradise' lies in the future: 'Look at the course of evolution to date; from amoebas to humans! Now what if the ratio, amoeba to human, were applied to fu-

ture evolution?

That is, amoebas are to humans as humans are to —

WHAT? Is it ridiculous to suggest that the

'what' might indeed be omega, geist, supermind,

spirit? That subconscious is to self-conscious as self-conscious is to superconscious?

That prepersonal gives way to personal, which gives way to transpersonal?

That Brahman is not only the ground of evolution but the goal as well?

We may all take heart, concludes Wilber, 'for it now appears cer-

tain that you and I came up from Eden so that we may all return to Heaven'.

Drawing inspiration from the insights of Fichte, Hegel, Schelling, Sri Aurobindo, Nicolas Berdyaev, Teilhard de Chardin, Erich Neumann, Jean Gebser and Joseph Campbell, Wilber

has formulated in *Up From Eden*, a towering discourse on the origin, nature and destiny of consciousness. □

Courtesy: *A Green Shade: Encounters with Pathfinders*.



The Trinity at the Elephanta caves. The individual ego is a marvellous high-order unity, but compared with the unity of the cosmos at large, it is a pitiful slice of holistic unity.

A. V. ASHOK

Dr. A. V. Ashok has a Ph.D in English Literature and has been a research scholar in the subject at Madurai University and then undertook a teaching assistantship at the Southern Illinois University, USA. From our correspondence with him we have discovered him to be a painstaking and meticulous scholar, writing with equal facility on subjects as diverse as the English language, aesthetics and philosophical debates. Dr. Ashok teaches at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) at Hyderabad. He is the author of *Literature and Sorrow*, *A Green Shade: Encounters with Pathfinders* and *Hours of Enchantment: The Narrative Aesthetics of Time*.

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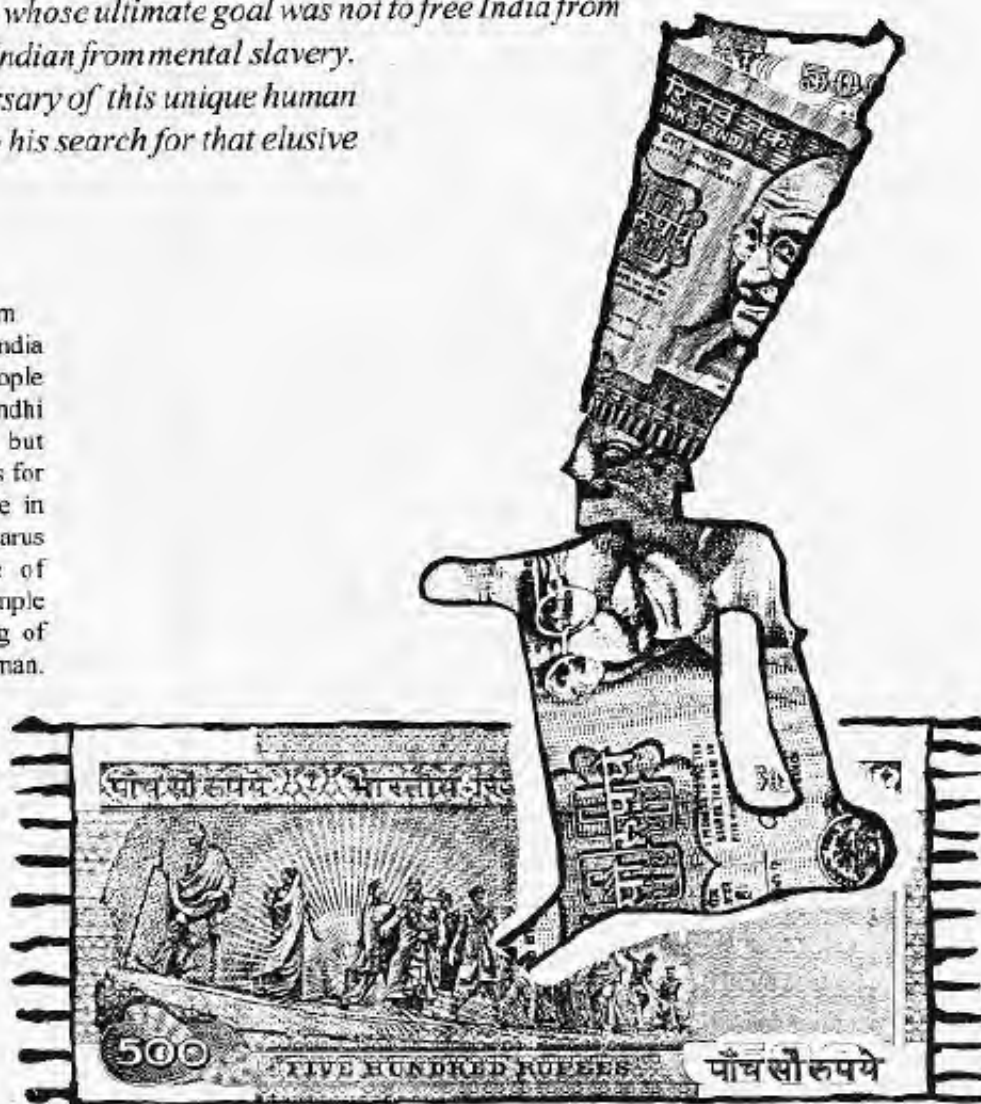
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# Recalling GANDHI

*Raghava R. Menon*

*What is it about Gandhi that inspires endless literature on him? The fact is that after him India has had no national hero of similar moral calibre. And experience has proven that finally nothing touches the human heart more than moral calibre. It is that chord that nourishes, excites and inspires. The author here probes the virtual reality of the mind and soul of the man whose ultimate goal was not to free India from the British but to free the Indian from mental slavery. In this, the 125th anniversary of this unique human being, we pay homage to his search for that elusive thing called 'truth'.*

**W**hen Richard Attenborough's film Gandhi arrived in India a couple of decades ago, people here began to wonder about Gandhi all over again. He had all but disappeared from Indian minds for many decades only to surface in learned seminars like a risen Lazarus hovering in the ambience of scholarly meetings on his simple perceptions on the meaning of service and the true dignity of man.







One reason why Indians, in a certain sense, gave up on Gandhi and took to examining with greater attention the soft options of his teachings, was the deepening sense of despair arising from the realisation that to truly direct one's choices in the direction of Gandhi, the philosophical basis of his beliefs would have to be adopted not just as a prescription, but as a way of life. This is more easily said than done.

One of the significant characteristics of putting the teachings of Gandhi into real life has been the widespread desire among those who call themselves Gandhians, to believe that impeccable moral standards, a certain austerity in public life, restrained consumption of the world's goods and a conviction that means determine ends would constitute and summarise his practices. Yet it took a very short time after his assassination, in a Gandhiless India, to discover that this was nowhere near enough to make the slightest difference to anything in the country nor indeed in their own lives. Indeed, it was pretty clear that on this recipe alone Gandhism comes unstuck.

A quick once over of Gandhi's philosophy would make it transparently clear that it was because Gandhism's substantive thrust was towards the transformation of man and not to social goals, that facile (and futile) attempts

at rearranging society, making new laws, banning child marriages and things of that genre, merely produced cynicism and despair.

Take non-violence, for example, which, among Gandhi's ideas, is one of those that evoke the widest response whenever his name is mentioned. To look this concept in the eye and grasp that true non-violence is not possible without non-possession is not easy. All that we Indians could do is to squirm

when we recognise that there is no halfway point at which to meet this idea.

Gandhi believed and lived this belief that if you possessed one single thing which was more than your absolute mini-mum need, then in principle you have stolen it, even if in acquiring it you have neither scaled walls nor meddled with locks. He believed that unless a person was in a state of mind in which he had nothing to lose, he could never be fearless. Possession was at the root of all fear. A man who lived beyond his minimum physical needs could never be non-violent, even if he never hurt a fly and turned his cheek everytime he was slapped. Non-possession was a state of mind. That is why Gandhian non-violence can only be lived. It cannot be

imitated without becoming bizarre and vulgar. A man who wants nothing, from whom nothing can be taken away, nothing added, only such a man can be truly non-violent. Gandhi's spectacular success in the field of non-violence was not a tactic, but the stunning efficacy of non-possession.

His own life, therefore, was not an imitation of the poor of India. There was nothing in common between Gandhi and the poor of India. Gandhi's simplicity of life was not the simplicity or poverty of India's poor, who wanted more but could not have any. So, in that sense, Gandhi was not poor at all. It was the wanting that made all the difference.

*To look this concept in the eye and grasp that true non-violence is not possible without non-possession is not easy. All that we Indians could do is to squirm when we recognise that there is no halfway point at which to meet this idea. That is why Gandhian non-violence can only be lived. It cannot be imitated without becoming bizarre and vulgar.*



So to imagine that Gandhi's adoption of poverty as a deference to the poor of India is naive and is not borne out by the quality and thrust of his work.

On these terms it mattered little whether Gandhi was a democrat, capitalist, communist, socialist, dictator or saint. All of his philosophy emerges from this simple fact. His vegetarianism, his trusteeship theory, indeed every aspect of his life, was governed by his belief in giving up everything that is not the irreducible minimum necessary for sustaining life.

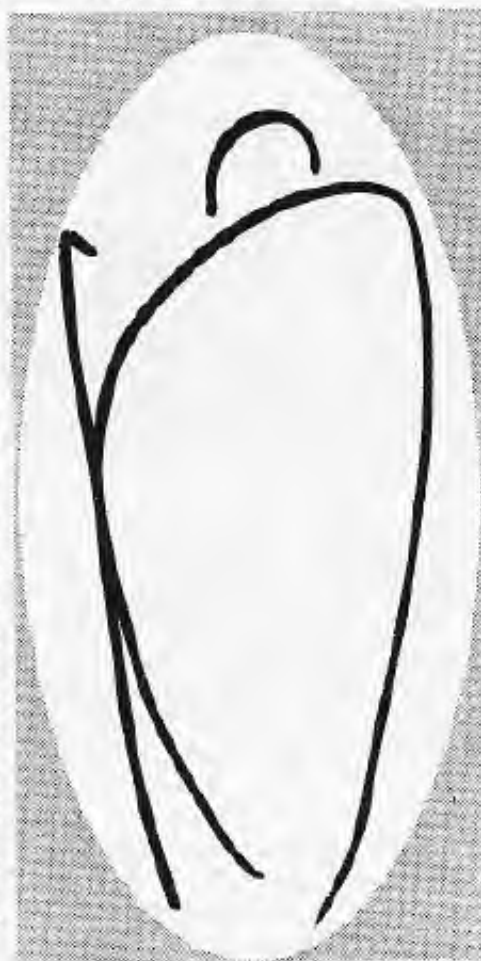
Only a man who did not, in the Gandhian sense, take what was not his own, only such a man could be utterly fearless and only fearless people could be free. So, while he worked tirelessly, on the one hand for India's freedom, he also knew that this was only a formal matter — the removal of the British from the scene. The slavery of the Indian was a thing within. It had nothing to do with the British. So, until non-possession became the accepted form of life in India, there was not the slightest possibility of the Indian being free. The Indian continued being a slave with or without the British. Merely substituting the white *sahib* with a brown one did not make for freedom. He was a supreme realist, never getting entangled with words or mere ideas that had no true existence in the life of man.

Gandhi never developed a fully argued and stated philosophy. He did not ever go explicitly into first principles. He perceived certain truths objectively and knew that these truths formed the pith and germ of the whole moral order. He then made subjective forays into experimenting with them — so his decision making process had a probing, developing quality about it. This process was sometimes inspired and sudden, but at other times he would wait, hovering and prowling around the contemplated action until he was sure that the truths he had perceived were locked firmly into the action he planned to take.

Once he was sure he cared nothing for the outcome, remaining serene and unperturbed in the midst of strife or failure. Sometimes he would be mistaken, or something in the events diluted the energy and the force of the truths he had earlier believed to be true. He would then withdraw mercilessly from what he set out to achieve even if the events were poised to succeed. He is known to have called his action a Himalayan blunder, slapped a twenty one day fast on himself and begged his 'inner voice' for guidance.

Gandhi did not concern himself with any concept of an imposed and artificial equality among men, so that,

***States and governments had themselves no natural obligations. They were mechanical devices like bicycles or mousetraps.***



to socialists and communists, he seemed a very prince of reaction and a champion of capitalists. For he saw the concept of an artificial and imposed equality among men as a means by which the State made its power absolute, that is, by preventing an individual from fulfilling his natural obligations. He saw man's equality in the fact that all men had equal obligations, rich, poor, aristocrat or commoner. His objections to caste arose from this view of obligations. By striating society in the form of caste, the system robbed the upper caste and the untouchable equally from performing their natural obligations by substituting natural obligations with phoney ones, exploitation in the place of service. He knew that the State had the power to take away a man's natural obligations to his fellowmen and this was the most fearsome aspect of organised institutions and governments. For instance, by preventing a man from fulfilling his natural obligation to clean his own effluvium by institutional and public undertakings, the State robbed him of his duty towards cleanliness of air and environment. So, paradoxically, the dirtiest and most polluted areas of the country were those administered by public bodies. He did not believe that the State had the power to formulate any of the natural obligations of its citizens, because states and governments had themselves no natural obligations. They were mechanical devices like bicycles or mousetraps. A mechanical device, however cunningly constructed, did not have a conscience and conscience is the source of the awareness of obligation.

It was this intense awareness of natural obligations that fuelled the unique form of dissent against the British government — *satyagraha* or non co-operation. And also his plea for village republics. For he recognised that it was in the small and mutually dependant village size unit that the maximum opportunity for fulfilling man's natural obligations can exist and therefore, a





has the power to be a symbol maker. No one since Gandhi's time has been capable of providing symbols for Indians to use. The principle purpose of the Gandhian symbol was not to serve an economic, political or social good alone but to create individual transformations, minute rebirths. Many hundred individual transformations can naturally alter social organisms and have impacts on society. When Nehru called handspun cloth the 'livery of freedom', he still meant freedom from the British, whereas, fundamentally, Gandhi meant individual freedom. When Gandhi marched 385 kilometres to the sea to pick up a handful of salt it became a symbol. The country sat up with a jerk. The power of the symbol and the nature of a man who can make one puzzled Indians (and, indeed, the world) and still puzzles them. The Gandhian symbols grew so potent over the years that many psychological transformations took place during British rule in India.

Gandhi had shown Indians that they could choose to live in the light of knowing or live in the darkness of myth and distortion. It was always open house on these choices. If today they would say to themselves that they wish it had been different they also know why things turn out the way they always do. □

village size unit is the only place where a man can enjoy all his rights and therefore he truly free and equal. He knew with a strange prescience that when villages disappeared and were swallowed up by cities all opportunities for fulfilling natural obligations also disappeared. The very geometry of the city prevented the performance of such obligations. And without this opportunity no rights could be given reality. And citizens who had only legal rights did not have true freedom. He believed that the formation of mega cities and freedom with true equality

were mutually contradictory. His objections to the machine age and to industrialisation arose entirely from his view of man's natural obligations without fulfilling which no man had any rights that were real. And since Gandhi valued freedom more than any single human good, he also valued the laws on which freedom that was real and not contrived could develop.

It was this awareness of individual fulfilled obligations that qualified him to be what the Sufis call an 'adept', or, in Arabic *naqshabandhi* — a man who

*Dr. Raghava Menon is an eminent scholar, philosopher, critic and musicologist, deeply respected in the world of arts and letters. He has authored several books on Indian classical music. They are The Pilgrim of the Svara, A Penguin Dictionary of Indian Classical Music, A Journey into Raga and Discovering Indian Music. Dr. Menon lives in New Delhi and is a visible person in the intellectual life of the city.*

*Illustrations: Rishi Kabra*

# AH GANESH !

*Bruce Proudfoot X*

*"On October 2nd, wrapped in a variety of waterproof-ish waterproofs, the odd goretex garment, under mostly plastic bags, bin liners and black brollies - beating loud drums loudly, a motley band of peace pilgrims left the sands of the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, headed by Japanese Zen monks, with a sense of purpose in their stride".*

*Thus wrote Bruce King (alias Proudfoot), thirtyish, Britisher from Chichester and walker extraordinaire, who undertook the Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life from Kanyakumari to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to terminate on August 6th and 9th 1995, the 50th anniversary of the bombing. From his rather colourful (and sometimes irreverently wise) narrative, we picked this one on Ganesh, the much loved Indian deity. But what indeed does he have to do with a peace walk? Don't underestimate this pachyderm for he has much to say, says the author in this crazy piece.*



**I**n Indian mythology he's the elephant-headed deity. He's a happy chappie, usually has four arms, sometimes as many as eight, holds a tusk, snake and a lotus and shows an open palm; left leg normally on the ground and right leg raised up; one tusk broken: one not; and a *Saddu*

cradled in his trunk. He is associated with Choocha, the rat, who is a friend and carries him whenever he wants to travel. It's a wonderful image - a portly elephant carried by a wee rodent.

Ganesh was born out of jealousy -

false jealousy, no less — an illusion (ring any bells?) His father, Lord Shiva had been up to male macho things. He'd headed off to the Himalayas to meditate, smoke heavily wadded chillums, discourse on life, the universe, leaving his young, lovely wife, Parvati, to look after the kids. (Ring any more bells?).

He eventually arrived home with a big beard and a bag of dirty washing and immediately blundered his first big blunder before even taking off his shoes or wiping his feet. He was totally off with the fairies as it were, and lost all sense of time (which is not a bad thing in itself. Let's not forget Relativity). He was excited to see his lady wife.

As he crossed the garden he could see into the bedroom. Sitting on the bed was Parvati having her hair gently combed by a handsome young man. Shiva, the sage, who'd just learnt it all, lost it all as jealousy spurted out of both his nostrils, and threw him completely off balance.

He charged into the bedroom and lopped the young chap's head off. Parvati quickly rebuked him saying, "You good for nothing philosopher, where have you been? Oh ye with enlightenment, why have you just decapitated our son? The only way to save his life is to replace his head with that of the next animal you meet. Make haste before I do you mischief!"

So Shiva charged out of the house into the jungle and stumbled upon an elephant. He lopped off the unsuspecting animal's head and

replaced it with his son's head and rushed back home lugging a trunked head.

We'll forget about the four-legged jumbo who was left to roam the lush jungle with a handsome human head and focus here on Ganesh instead, who, as we have already discovered, is born out of jealousy - an illusion. The mythology continues.

Some time later, Brahma, the over-all big shot, big time God, saw that the world was in danger. The globe was breaking up because of human neglect and greed. Brahma, along with the other high-ranking Gods and Goddesses, decided to collaborate with Shiva in an attempt to save the planet.

So they celebrated by handing Lord Shiva a cake. A hefty, moist fruit loaf of peace-wisdom and said, "Now you have perfect wisdom and peace...you will be a representative for all other humans. Through your calmness and clarity, all will arrive at *shanti*. Confusion will disperse, the fun spirit of respect will shine etc. etc."

Shiva was handed a fresh, warm cake of peace-wisdom. It was a lot of peace-wisdom and he panicked like most of us when we are confronted with it. He passed it quickly on to his wife muttering "phew!"

When we know peace is not just possible but is readily available, we take a safe nibble and pass it along saying, "I'll take a larger bite later. For now, I'm too busy saving trees and paying school fees. Maybe I'll find peace in my next life". Bah! Humbug! Jabberwocky!

So there it is. Parvati gets the cake.



*Ganesh represents a certain cunningness-creativity, the genius in humans, the novelty in the self, the ingenuity of the psyche beyond the rational. He represents the fact that we have the ability to remove our own obstacles.*

But she doesn't want to upset the apple cart of her security either. "Let the kids get the cake", mused she. "They are young. I want them to be happy and wise", she thought, justifying herself.

Ganesh, our hero, beamed a little, smacked his lips, rubbed his belly and trunk and held out his eager four, six or eight hands, somewhat like an unemployed octopus at the DSS.

His little brother Muruga stepped in

and said, "Mummy, I want half the cake".

"OK",

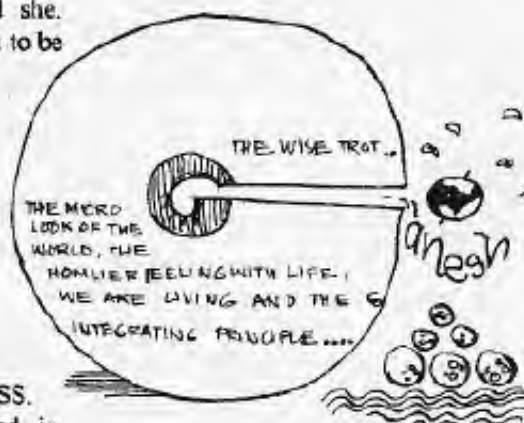
said silly mummy and prepared to cut the cake 50/50.

"Stop!" cried poor Brahma, turning white at the gills. "How can you possibly break peace-wisdom in half? Don't be absurd!"

So Pa and Ma organised a race-competition. The first to travel around the world and arrive would have the cake. New passports and visas were issued. At the crack of dawn Ganesh's rat and Muruga's peacock were under starter's orders. The big peace-race began.

Muruga's peacock thundered into the clouds with him holding on to his brightly plumaged neck. Big, heavy Ganesh looked at his rodent friend who was keen to get going.

But let's pause here as the race gets underway. Ganesh represents a certain cunningness-creativity, the genius in humans, the novelty in the self, the ingenuity of the psyche beyond the rational. He represents the fact that we have the ability to remove our own obstacles. Close to what Buddha said, only Ganesh isn't going to dole out any four noble truths. He isn't going to tell us how to do it. He's going to plunge us into the





deep end of the pool and watch. He says, "Use your own gumption, just like buying *laddu*, or Pooh Bear with his Taoist hat on being excited over breakfast"

Hindustani translates the word 'cunning' more in the way of a vixen protecting her cubs, rather than that of a second-hand car dealer attempting a shady deal. Our hero is associated with Hindustani cunningness.

This is exciting. Our grandparents may have been wise in making bread poultices to draw out remnants of fish bone impaled in a finger and wise too in sowing seeds during the phases of the moon....but it's 1995 and it doesn't take 20/20 vision to see that the globe is in a dilemma. Do we want to really build such big dams? Do we really want to swap self-generating rain forests for tins of Del Monte in our already overstacked shopping trolleys? Is it that we are really off our trolleys?

So, Ganesh really represents self-motivation...with joy, the fire spirit inside our sleepy security to transcend our woes. Here it is. The crux of the Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life being associated with a mythical elephant-headed deity.

To return to our tale — remembering that mythology is timeless, Ganesh watched his brother take off across the world, looked at Choocha his rodent buddy and posed the question, "Around the world? What is our world, Choocha? We know nothing of Vietnam or orange trees; we know nothing of the Mayor of

Hiroshima whose last words may have been, 'My God, what's that big bang?' We know nothing of obsolete, sunken Russian submarines filled with high-grade nuclear waste, rusting and rotting like time bombs - out of sight out of mind".

Ganesh did more than swing a red double-edged Swiss army penknife. He dealt with a sharp 108 bladed cutlass



on the prow of the *Rainbow Warrior* on the high seas; balancing on one leg, with a rat on his shoulder, lotus flower in hand, tusk in another, grappling with his remaining five hands for nothing more than clean water for himself, his children and his children's children.

"What is my world?", he mused and slipped off with Choocha to the

village to consult Muse on the issue and share a glass of *chai*. Ganesh and Choocha continued round the village, purchased some *laddu* from the sweetwalla, collected some groceries, popped into the library to return an overdue book on oxherding, helped erect a marquee at the local Krishnamurthy School. A final *chai* and *laddu* stop at a friend's house before catching a cycle rickshaw home; perfectly in time, long before Muruga came.

It was meal time. *Dal*, rice and *chappatis* were being served around. Ganesh looked up at the Gods and Goddesses and said over yet another glass of sweet ginger *chai*, "I've just been around my world. I'm back. I've won. May I have my cake? I'm hungry for peace-wisdom."

He won, hands down, all eight of them.

Many stories take off from here in the realm of Ganesh. To heal the wounds of our planet, there are no boundaries. Your little world is the whole world. Cross boundaries with skill in imagination. "There are no barriers", thus saying he and Choocha went for a walk. This is the Tao of Ganesh. □

*Bruce (Proudfoot) King, is a young seeker and adventurer, having travelled to several parts of the world. Bruce is also a talented performer (of many things) and a poet. He lives in the UK when he is not elsewhere.*

*Illustrations: Manoj Kothari*

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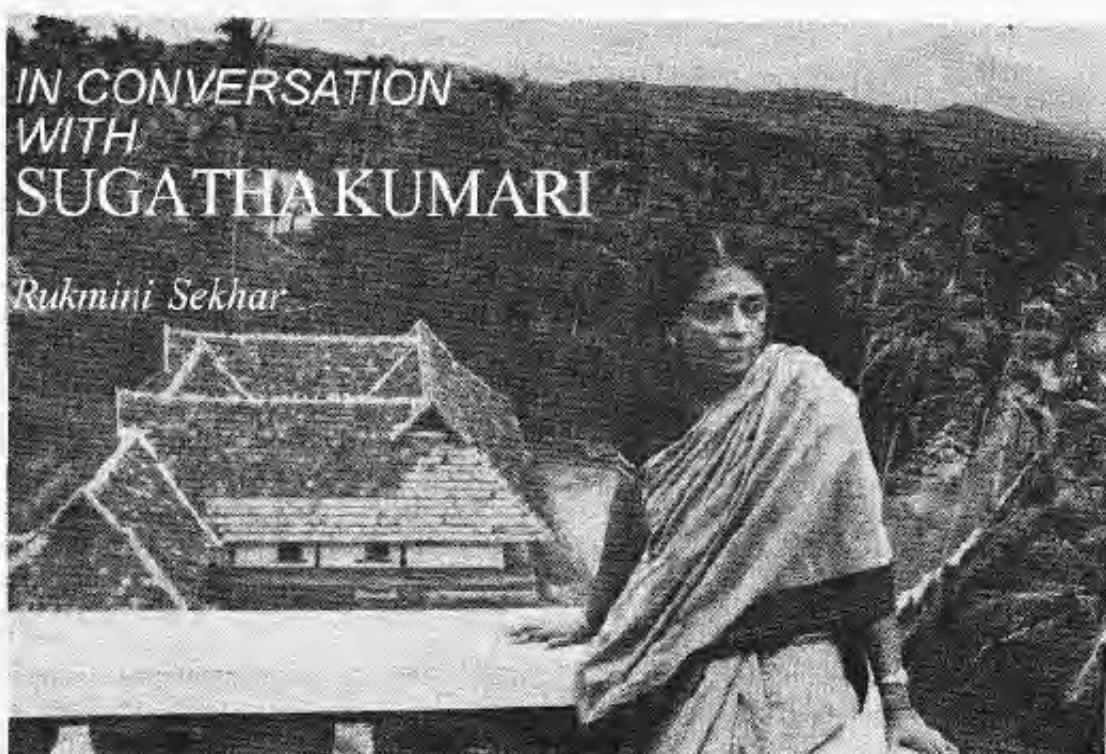
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SASIDHARAN KUNARAPURAM

*In a tiny little state in the deep south of India some bitter battles are being fought. And these battles are about respect for life. When humanity reaches some new lows in the evolutionary process, someone, or something happens. The 'someone' in this case is encapsulated in the person of Sugatha Kumari, an extraordinary woman with kind, moist eyes, a gentle smile and a fire within. Her person underlines the fact that when women take to the field they mean business. Compassion seems to be her chief motivating force. Her unfailing toil is to stop the desecration of nature and stem the tide of human cruelty. Sugatha Chechi or Amma, as she is known in Kerala, enters territories where others fear to tread and what's more, comes out, more often than not, triumphant. Poetess, social activist, environmentalist and humanist, she is rare...*

*Her numerous awards include the State and Central Sahitya Akademi Award for literature, the All India Womens' Conference Diamond Jubilee Honour for her work with women and the Vriksha Mitra (Friend of the Tree) Award.*



**Rukmini Sekhar:**

You are acclaimed as one of Kerala's foremost literary personalities, a very respected poetess. Can you tell us how you came to be one?

**Sugatha Kumari:** I started very early. My father was a poet too and used to recite poetry beautifully. He was my first influence. I used to hum lines of what I thought was poetry and then try to mould those lines into coherence. When I was about fifteen I started writing seriously. My first poem was published in the Women's College magazine in Trivandrum. When I was in my final year M.A., I sent my poem to *Mathrubhoomi*, a prestigious newspaper. I got a letter of praise from N.V. Krishna Warriar, the editor, and I can't tell you how thrilled I was! N.V. was our hero. Then I got a letter from an unknown student saying *Mathrubhoomi* is waiting for you, write again. I was very shy about my writings and never showed them to my parents or even to my sister. So I sent my poems to *Mathrubhoomi* under a false name, Shri Kumar. He was a cousin who was staying with us at that time. That was around 1955-56.

**R.S.:** Your poems have a strong social significance reflecting your political views, environmentalism and activism. What was your background in this area?

**S.K.:** My father was a Congressman, the old Congress, mind you. He was a freedom fighter filled with the all too rare ideals of patriotism and sacrifice. So I was generally aware of politics right from my childhood. I didn't really write on those themes then. When you are young you are more romantic and my poems reflected that romanticism. But a genuine poet has to look within



*Like the earth which is increasingly becoming barren, we are becoming barren too. Like water which is getting polluted, our minds are becoming polluted and poisonous.*

and slowly face the realities of the world without. That's when I took up my pen to express my anguish about what was happening in India — in fact, the whole world. What went wrong with our values? Why are we losing humanity and compassion? Why have we lost our *dharma*? Like the earth which is increasingly becoming barren, we are becoming barren too. Like water which is getting polluted, our minds are becoming polluted and poisonous.

**R.S.:** Your poetry has been very effective in catalysing Kerala's awareness towards many things. But do creative writers necessarily have to be social reformers?

**S.K.:** Most creative writers are introverts and merely want to write peacefully. They need not and cannot all be social reformers. That does not, however mean that their creativity is reduced if they get involved in the betterment of humanity. Not everyone is as mad as me! I have this knack of getting into difficult and controversial situations! During our freedom struggle, our writers were at the forefront, moulding public opinion. I think we writers, as a breed, can communicate much better. For instance, during our struggle with the Silent Valley Project we discovered that people were much more inspired when writings touched their hearts, in fact much more than scientific or technical information. When my poems about the whole situation began to get published, people felt we were speaking their language and you can say that large numbers of Keralites began to get ecologically literate during that time. A poet can communicate much better than a scientist.

**R.S.:** A quotation about your poetry goes thus, 'A mild flavour of mysticism endows her poetry with an air of remoteness and melancholy sweetness'. What do you feel when you actually sing your poetry?

**S.K.:** I can't give you an exact answer. Feelings are not exact. All I can say is that poetry is part of my being, like breathing. I can't live without it.

**R.S.:** I get the feeling that you are deeply moved by suffering. Indians tend to take it as their *karmic* lot, as a fact of inevitable destiny. Then why bother to alleviate it?

**S.K.:** We are masters of our *karma*. The *Gita* says we have to do our duty.





*When I walked through the portals of the mental hospital, I was blinded by the suffering, fear and hopelessness. I became desperate to conquer this fear. My mind was in a turmoil and fearful thoughts came flooding in. That's how the word 'abhaya' came to my mind. Abhaya also means refuge. Buddha's famous posture connotes refuge.*

You can't sit idle and say it is all *karma*. We have to fight, be active, work hard. Evil is *tamas*, darkness. If we can wipe the tears of even one woman, it must change her *karma* as well as ours. Even if you feel totally helpless, consider this as something you must work to change. Don't bother about victory. Just do what you have to do. During my Silent Valley days I wrote that in each battle there are two sides — the winning side and the losing side. Join the losing side, be a soldier of the losing side. We are surrounded by hellish evils — liquor lobbies, black money, corruption. If we remain indifferent these will swallow us.

**R.S.:** Sugatha Chechi, during the last decade you have done miraculous things for mental patients in Kerala. The name of your organisation is *Abhaya*, which means fearless. Isn't that an unusual name for a shelter that concerns itself with mental patients? Did you have any metaphysical connotations of fear when you gave it this name?

**S.K.:** Fear, sorrow, *ashanti* — restlessness, are *tamasogunas*, the lowest in the order of *gunas* or qualities. *Tamas*, as I said earlier, is darkness, dullness, hopelessness. It is said in the *Vedas*, *hiranmayena patrena aachaditam...* i.e.,

the face of truth is covered with golden vessels, one cannot look at it directly. It pierces your eyes, hurts your sight just like when you squarely face the sun. Suffering and truth are two sides of the same coin.

When I walked through the portals of the mental hospital, I was blinded by the suffering, fear and hopelessness. I became desperate to conquer this fear. My mind was in turmoil and fearful thoughts came flooding in. That's how the word *abhaya* came to my mind. *Abhaya* also means refuge. Buddha's famous posture connotes refuge.

**R.S.:** Can you briefly tell us about the birth of *Abhaya*?

**S.K.:** One day a young man came and told me that the women inmates of the Trivandrum Mental Hospital were ill treated and sexually abused. They were regularly prostituted to the men of the neighbouring police camp and the hospital authorities turned a blind eye, naturally, for some of the returns from it. I could not sleep a wink that night. How could anyone do such a thing was buzzing in my head. These women are not prostitutes, they didn't know what was happening to them.

I decided that I must do something. I took a friend with me to the mental

hospital. Till 1985 the mental hospital doors were closed for any public scrutiny. On a few occasions some VIPs were taken around like tourists. Mother Teresa was one of them. Even though the wards were spruced up for her she wept, saying this was hell on earth. There was a lot of fuss after that, but then things died down.

**R.S.:** But, isn't the condition of mental hospitals the same in the other states?

**S.K.:** It is the same everywhere. But here in Kerala it's a crying shame. It is the most literate state not only in India, but in the whole world — even the U.S. It is a state where women's education and awareness is high. Why should this happen here?

**R.S.:** What was your experience at the hospital?

**S.K.:** There was the old system of single cells. These tiny cells had four to five women packed into them. There was an open latrine in one corner. The floors were broken. The place was full of human excreta and the smell was foul. The women's bodies were covered with sores and they were stark naked. They were emaciated and their hair was matted. They didn't even look like human beings.

One old woman, eyes filled with desolation, looked at me and cried, "Daughter, I'm hungry, I'm hungry!" I couldn't do anything. I just stood there sobbing. Her cry was picked up by the other women and soon the ward was resounding with their cries of "I'm hungry!" I started walking and then the doctors came running after me.

**R.S :** How did you manage to enter the hospital in the first place?

**S.K :** The people of Kerala know that I am a trouble maker and so I got special sanction!

**R.S :** Then what happened?

**S.K :** Well, I had a real fight with the doctors. They argued that they were helpless because they were short of funds and that the lower staff were underpaid and uncontrollable. But I kept on asking them, "What have you done to change these conditions?" They started getting irritated and told me to stay out of what was not my business. I said I was about to do something to change things. One of them asked me, "Is this a challenge?" and I said "Yes!"

That very evening I called all my

friends who were working with me on environmental issues. Some of them were skeptical saying that this work was beyond our ken. But I tried to convince them that if they had seen the situation, there was no escape from it, they had to be involved. To go into all the details of how we went about it would cover many pages, so I'll give you a summary of sorts. The members of the about-to-be-formed organisation came from all walks of life—politicians, intellectuals, citizens and activists. We contacted the press. Then the MLAs, who took up the subject in the State Assembly. Public opinion had reached its peak and finally, the Health Minister referred it to the Health Secretary, Mr. Krishnamoorthy, who himself had tried earlier to improve mental hospitals but couldn't make much headway due to red tapism. He told us that we could file a case against him and gave us permission to visit the hospital whenever we wanted. He said we should also visit the hospitals at Trichur and Calicut and assess conditions there. We initiated protest marches, rallies and *dharnas* all over the state. In Calicut, Gandhians and Naxalites joined hands, followed by medicos and others. We had no choice but to raise a huge public voice to move the government. Finally, the High Court instituted a commission called the Justice Narendran Commission to conduct a legal inquiry into the matter. The press was fantastic. They even disguised themselves as coolies to get in and take photographs!

After the exposure, the next step was to actually do some constructive work. We collected thousands of old clothes, food and other things and began to distribute them.

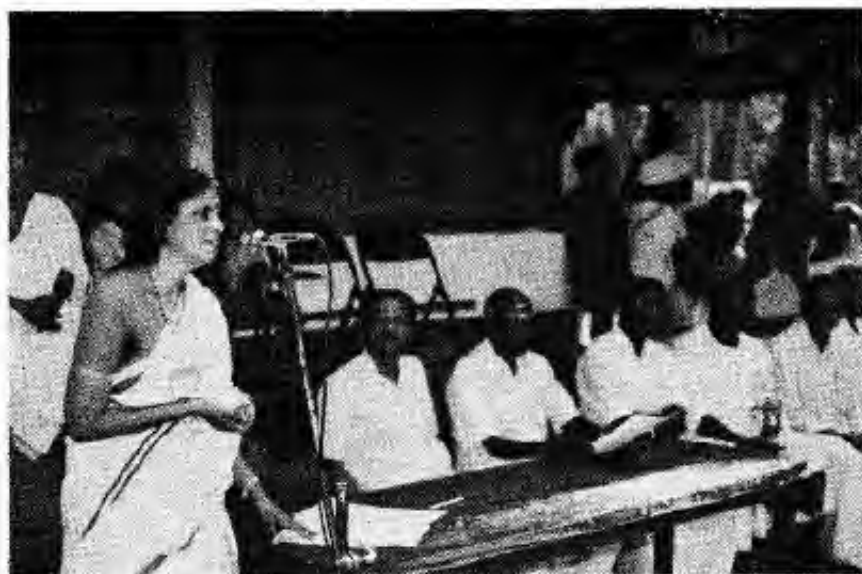
**R.S :** You had taken on a sleeping leviathan and tried to wake it up. What were the reactions?

**S.K :** The government couldn't afford to be on the defensive; there was too much at stake here, since this was a humanitarian issue and cut across all politics. But the psychiatric community

*A poet can communicate much better  
than a scientist.*



*Unfortunately, we in Kerala, have begun to imitate North Indian society. The dowry system has infiltrated this society and the Sati-Savitri image shown on national television is becoming the popular image here. Our women hail from the land of Unniarcha, not Sita.*



was dead against us. They hurled abuses at us through the press. Why are lay people interfering in professional matters, they asked. We said we are not interfering in the treatment, but mentally ill people are human beings too and must be allowed to live with dignity and their basic needs fulfilled.

**R.S :** Is this not a human rights issue? Did you inform any international organisation like Amnesty?

**S.K :** No, we didn't. It was our duty to expose the malady. And mind you, changes were taking place rapidly in the three government mental hospitals of the state. Most importantly, after 150 years, the closed doors of these hospitals were thrown wide open. In one psychiatric conference I remember saying, "The searchlight of society is now

upon these unfortunate places and it will never be dark again".

*Abhaya*, now formed, began to interface with the Mental Hospital, Trivandrum. We started raising funds to get clothes, books, cots, vessels, etc. A meditation centre, *Shanti*, was started. Festivals are celebrated.

**R.S :** You have initiated a number of welfare programmes in this unfortunate area of human existence and others. Can you briefly enumerate them?

**S.K :** We started something called 'Green Therapy', i.e., rearing a nursery of saplings. Two lakh saplings were nurtured and handed over to the Social Forestry Wing of the government. A day care centre, *Pakal Veedu*, was established for non-residential mental

tation centre for drug addicts and alcoholics.

**R.S :** So far I have only asked you about your work with the mentally sick. But you are better known for your very good work in the area of our natural heritage, our environment. You won a great peoples' victory by spearheading one of the fiercest environmental battles ever fought, the protest against the Silent Valley Hydel Project. Your victory made headlines. What, according to you was the outcome?

**S.K :** As a poet I loved nature. I couldn't bear to see the Western Ghats getting denuded year by year. When the Silent Valley issue came up I thought it would be a good idea to form an organisation that would draw attention in general to the plight of nature vis a vis development. We called it *Prakriti Samrakshana Samiti*. All the writers of Kerala joined us and this, I think is quite unique to this state. We composed poems and sang them at *mushairas*. These are very popular in Kerala. We set up special '*prakriti mushairas*' or nature poetry gatherings. We were able to touch many hearts. And the outcomes? Well, now, the judiciary has become alert and several environmental cases receive speedy attention. As I said earlier, Kerala is becoming eco-literate. If there is a common





environmental threat to the state, then all the little groups will come together. We have seen this happening time and again.

**R.S :** Is there something in your life that has made a lasting impression on you?

**S.K :** Innumerable things. Silent Valley and then *Abhaya*. My placid world turned topsy turvy. But yes, one incident comes to mind. A judge came to me one day and said, "Will you kill my daughter? She is about forty, and her mother has died. She is mentally sick". I was shocked as never before. Later I was to learn that this question, 'what will happen to my child after my death', came up constantly. I wrote a poem, *How Should I Kill* about a mother with a mad daughter who becomes a burden to all and none, after her death.

**R.S :** I hear very contradictory things about the women of Kerala. They are empowered in every sense of the word — they are educated, have a right to property and are generally aware. Yet many aspects of patriarchy have asserted themselves to destabilise this. Is this true?

**S.K :** Earlier, women in Kerala were not a frightened species since they had a right to wealth and property. Except for the Namboodiris (who are part of Brahminical patriarchy), all the other communities were secure. Even the Christians are fighting to change discriminatory laws. But unfortunately, we in Kerala, have begun to imitate North Indian society. The dowry system has infiltrated this society (which has a matrilineal system), and the Sati-Savitri image shown on national television is becoming the popular image here. Our women hail from the land of Unniarcha, not Sita. Now, our women are tear-ridden, downtrodden and miserable. Rape, suicide and crime against women have increased dramatically.

Then there is the liquor lobby, which, as you know, is very patriarchal, and

that destabilises women. In most middle class and poor families liquor has entered like a devil. Our women, unlike their Andhra counterparts, are not fighting back, because of, as they say, self-respect. Liquor sparks off a chain of other problems and most often the direct victims are women. Our destitute home is full of women abused by alcoholic husbands. Our women are no more free and strong — they have bitten the consumerism bait!

**R.S :** Kerala has the highest suicide rate in India, another paradoxical fact. Would you agree that most of this is

your eyes. Do you ever get scared in a male world?

**S.K :** I'm very proud to be a woman and all my life I'll struggle for the empowerment of our species. It is not easy in a male world. They don't mind accepting me as a poet, but when I stick my neck into hot water, things get very unpleasant. I have even been called a CIA Agent! And my life has been threatened many times. But, why should I be scared? I have nothing to hide and therefore have no fear...

**R.S :** What do you have to tell our readers?



Before — after, the greening of barren lands: a Sugatha Kumari project.

related to the onslaught of rampant consumerism?

**S.K :** An intelligent society is also sometimes the more vulnerable one. Keralites are more vigorous and exposed. Their absorption powers are high. They are also sensitive and cannot easily face the meaninglessness of their education and lives. The gaps between their dreams (Gulf money included) and realities is wide and they can't take it. Keralites often don't reveal their frustrations and so they break down more easily.

**R.S :** You are a tough woman. Yet the light of mature femininity shines in

**S.K :** Don't have barren hearts. And concern yourself with things that really matter. Like doing things not merely for yourself. We are mostly doing meaningless things... And yes, let's get a little Gandhi back into our lives!

*Transliterated by Uma S. Nair  
and Manushi Jalan*

*Photos: Sugatha Kumari*

# THE GIRL CHILD IN THE NINETIES

*Sugatha Kumari*

It is dark. In this holy court-yard  
This tiny babe, I leave:  
The one of shameful birth.  
Take her in your protective hands!

It is a girl. Yet I could not choke  
her to death.  
Pardon me.  
Give her too a corner  
In your vast lap.

I have given her a bath in  
mother's tears  
And breast-fed her for one last  
time  
And placed a kiss on her tiny  
forehead—  
Be it a mascot dot!

And then O Mother Earth!  
I am leaving in your furrows  
This orphaned kid,  
This poor little Sita.

Will there be a dawn for her?  
A day?  
or is she to be crushed the very  
same night  
Between some sharp and cruel  
teeth?

Tomorrow, oh tomorrow,  
Will she have a morrow?  
Girl this is, abandoned on the day  
of birth  
A life for her? What strange hope!

Will she ever know  
The meaning of love?  
Which orphanage will shelter her—  
This faceless human kid?  
What destiny awaits her?

Is she to be flown to an alien land  
And laid on the table in a science  
lab?  
To be the Indian girl again?

Who is there to save lakhs  
for a dowry for her?  
Who to cover her in gold  
And make her a bride of pride?

Is she to be burnt alive  
Her crime, not fetching enough  
gold?  
Or to be hanged away  
With the word, thrice uttered?

Is she to labour from morn till night  
Only to be starved by degrees to  
death?

Or to be black and blue,  
A victim of senseless drunkenness?

Is she to be auctioned in the  
market?

Or be thrown into the red street,  
Into the midst of  
blood-sucking vampires?

Yes, my precious jewel,  
Why do you stare thus  
Into my eyes, now smiling  
Now sobbing, reflective?

Mother! I am. I too was born a girl  
And lived on  
Only as my poor mother lacked  
The courage to strangle me.

All this is truth. And yet  
Let me cherish a fond dream:  
The day will bloom into brightness  
And a Janaka will appear to claim

My little Sita.

Never will she bend or bow her head  
Nor permit anyone to bow  
Stand she will on her own legs  
Her motherly face, all smiles and  
love.

Flames of indomitable strength  
Embodied as children will follow  
her.  
A tower of strength she will be  
Where Mother Earth will find solace

Yes I dream, I do have a dream  
Even this girl deserves my dream —  
This orphan abandoned  
Among the share market's shouts

The night is draining off  
No time to linger on.  
A kiss on her forehead  
A final farewell kiss ...

Never turn back. Run away. Run  
fast.  
No wailings. Let lips be tight  
Ears plugged and eyes dry.  
Draw the surging tears back inward  
Let no drops of love wet your breasts  
Blot them off.

Let not the wounded breasts bleed  
And leave the stains.  
No turning back now.  
Run away, run fast, run... □

*Translated from the original,  
Malayalam by M. Leelavathy*

# COSMIC CASH

## PILGRIM'S PROGRESS -

### THE STORY OF RUDRAVANAM

Rukmini Sekhar



Time has not yet come when cosmic darshan happens through Internet or E Mail. But the poor Lord seated in his

low tech cosmic domicile is only a micro-con away from getting entangled in superspeed, supersonic virtual reality and being cragged down to show himself to busy pilgrims if he wants to retain his bonafide status.

The real reality is this — short term, black and white print in government files, shuttling from power to power within planning commissions to make Sabarimala, deep within the forests of Rudravanam, pilgrim friendly. The premise is simple — today's person has no time. And given that that is the case, God should actually feel grateful if a pilgrim decides to give him a dekho. I mean look at the competition and all that. So if he decides to air dash (since trains often crash) to Sabarimala and also have a bit of fun, why not?

Imagine the Pampa River, flowing like a silver sheet deep within the jungles of Kerala, advertised by the Tourism Department as 'God's Own Country.' Wait a minute, but God doesn't know yet that he's going to be an illegal immigrant here. Or if he's granted domicile and he's smart enough he can corner himself a little portion of

Rudravanam, that was once an awesome jungle where roamed tigers and other predators.

But yes, the Pampa. Flowing through the hills of Sabari, Sabarimala. The sacred river of Ayyappa the forest deity, half Vishnu half Shiva, beloved of pilgrims, demanding and rewarding. The Pampa river, *lakshman rekha* for pilgrims to de-automobilise themselves, pay renewed obeisance to their feet and leave their egos behind. Then begin the trudge of humility, barefoot, with their bundle of non-possession on their heads, after forty one days of hard fasting. The deity, squatting with ease, knees drawn up, arms flung over them, surrounded by animals, belongs to Rudravanam, the surrounding forest. It is his birthright. He has been living there since humanity can recollect. The Pampa and the forest are his.

Enter development brainwaves through chinks in the pilgrim's armour. Ayyappa has what it takes to be the right resource for what is now popularly known as 'temple tourism'. And here, adventure tourism takes on a whole

***Adventure tourism is being able to rev up your Tata Sierra at a hundred miles an hour and slam the breaks about half a kilometre from where Ayyappa sits. If you're lucky you might even catch a glimpse through the windscreen and be able to fling a coconut into the sanctum sanctorum.***

different meaning. For instance, you don't exactly want to become breakfast for Sher Khan and his ilk as you walk through the forest, eyes closed shouting *Swamiye Sharanamayyappa!* You also don't want to be nestled within the shadows of the forest come eventide. Adventure tourism is being able to rev up your Tata Sierra at a hundred miles an hour and slam the breaks about half a kilometre from where Ayyappa sits. If you're lucky you might even catch a glimpse through the windscreen and be able to fling a coconut into the sanctum sanctorum. Those who want to halt for the night before the morning glimpse can do so with the blessings of the Devaswom Board and the State government in one of the many cottages, specially discounted double rooms for the price of a single room, airconditioned suite with conference facilities, fax and telephone cubicles and other entertainment rooms.

Ladies and gentlemen, a township is about to happen half a kilometre from our little forest deity. It will lack nothing, there will be shopping complexes to compensate for any of the discomforts you might feel during this arduous pilgrimage. You can take your vehicle till the famous 'eighteenth step', from where the climb starts — that hallowed border between ignorance and knowledge. In fact, you can feel as if you haven't left home at all.

And Sabarimala is not without its share of miracles. After all can an authentic pilgrim centre have reasons for its bonafide existence without miracles? Look at Lourdes, millions of pilgrims, fantastic market for food and souvenirs. And if miracles don't happen naturally, they can always be engineered. Such as this. On *Makara Sankranti* day is the famous *Makara Villaku* or light, which is the most auspicious event in an Ayyappa pilgrim's calendar. This is witnessed by lakhs of devout pilgrims. On that very day, in Ponnambala Medu, visible from the pilgrim site, a great light is seen, and hold your breath, folks, a miracle is



about to happen. Check with awe-struck co-pilgrim who stares at spectacle. He will explain that the light you have just seen is the cosmic radiance from the lamps of the Gods (both important and un-important), in heaven, performing *arti* or worship of Ayyappan with lamps. If the gods have to live

in the age of the free market they have to become street smart and clever and know well how to market and sell themselves. That's why they chose that particular day—population, faith, mass hysteria, spending power—max.

Enter scam busters, waving flags and shouting 'State sponsored hoax!' They bribe a dissenting Devaswom Board informer and pour cold water on hot campior. For that was what it was. Some rational sleuthing revealed the following. A huge *urti* or vessel filled with camphor was placed strategically. On a rock nearby were placed some wet sacks. The P.A System has a running commentary fanning hysteria and increasing perspiration. At the right moment in the commentary (at given

code-word) the camphor is lit and a huge yellow flame soars skywards for two or three seconds (the precise moment when *arti* is done to Ayyappan and the gods get into a frenzy of lamp waving). A literate state gasps at seeing a *Satyayuga* miracle in *Kaliyuga*. Word spreads and so does the economy of the region. Lakhs of pilgrims will soon become crores.

But's what's worse than the scam busters is the arrival of a more deadly species—a backward, self-righteous, mob-gathering, hysterical species that calls themselves environmentalists. "Hear ye, O Keralites", they say, "Thou people who writest and readest more than thy neighbours, read ye the writing on the wall. Thou seest that thy

forests are about to be vanquished, and Ayyappan, our forest deity is going to be surrounded by the trappings of trendy civilisation. Stop ye those that invade us!"

The battle is on. Our friends, the environmentalists want to scuttle the township and build dormitories

for pilgrims in the smaller towns a little distance away. They say that the township won't solve the problems, you will never have enough for everyone. Only more garbage and VIPs. A hundred and fifteen hectares of forest will be killed in one fell swoop and a hundred and fifteen more VIPs will be housed there. They say, let not those who are in a hurry undertake a pilgrimage, for a pilgrimage is a slow unfolding of the soul. Those that want to reach the temple in a cloud of gasoline smoke may do better to watch one of Star Plus's Travel magazines. Cosmic cash cannot be made at just any old cost. Rudravnam, that lovely mystery of green has a right to be and Ayyappan to live there.... □



### MAIL TALE

We often receive letters from subscribers with an all too familiar complaint about non-receipt of THE EYE. It's a problem that's foxed us too, since we go to great lengths to ensure safe delivery of subscriber copies to the post office. Until we read this eye-popper in the Times of India recently:

*Every afternoon, an old woman lugs off bags splitting at the seams, ostensibly containing 'raddi' from the Delhi Paper Sorting Office at Civil Lines, close to the Old Secretariat.*

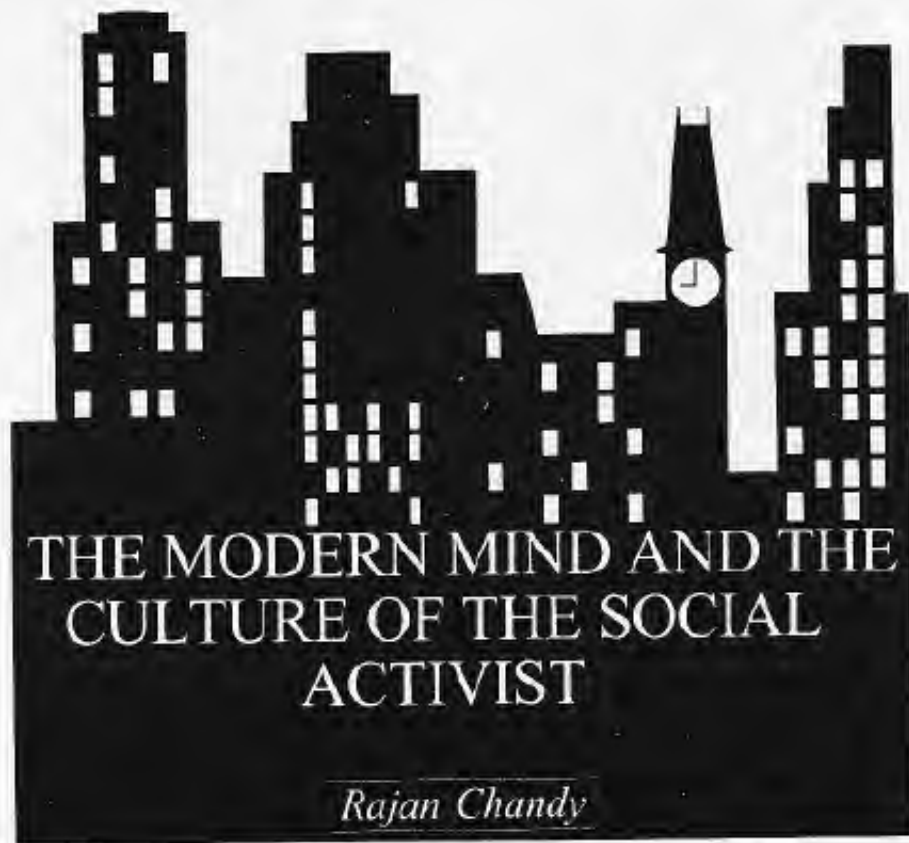
*Sources allege the bags hold undelivered mail, including newspapers, magazines and other important documents posted from India and abroad. The old woman, Krishna, claimed it was 'raddi' she had collected from outside the sorting office.*

*A raid by the postal department's vigilance wing this afternoon couldn't settle the dispute. For one, they refused to divulge details. And second, possibly foiled the raid by some sloppy sleuthing.*

*However, sources said each day, a number of bags containing newspapers and magazines from various parts of the country and abroad sent by unregistered post are sold as 'raddi' by the employees of this office. And the 'action', they said, usually takes place between 2 and 4 p.m. when the shift changes.*

*(Times of India, 4th July, 1995)*

The article goes on to describe a rather flat-footed operation by vigilance officials which ended inconclusively since the employees involved had possibly been alerted to the raid. The vigilance officials stone-walled all attempts by the press reporter to elicit any information. Could it be true? We, for one, think it's possible. So bear with us, dear reader. And like we've said before, let us know if you haven't received your copy of THE EYE. We'll be happy to mail you another.



ANOO KAMATH

“.....there is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by non-violent methods mostly succumbs, viz. activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form of innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multiplicity of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence, more than that, it is co-operation in violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralises his work for peace, it destroys the fruitfulness of his own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom, which alone makes work fruitful...”  
 - Thomas Merton.

Modern society is characterised by violence. It is not just the more manifest forms of violence which are obvious to everybody, but deeper, subtler and more pervasive forms of violence which constitute the core of the modern mind. Currently, mankind is geared towards the pursuit of wealth, power and sensual pleasure and it is ruthless in this pursuit. It is not only these goals but the single-mindedness of the pursuit which lie at the heart of the violence. This single-mindedness allows no other aspirations to arise within the social matrix. It constricts the space within which life can move and unfold.

All traditional cultures were imbued with a multiplicity of aims. While the pursuit of wealth, power

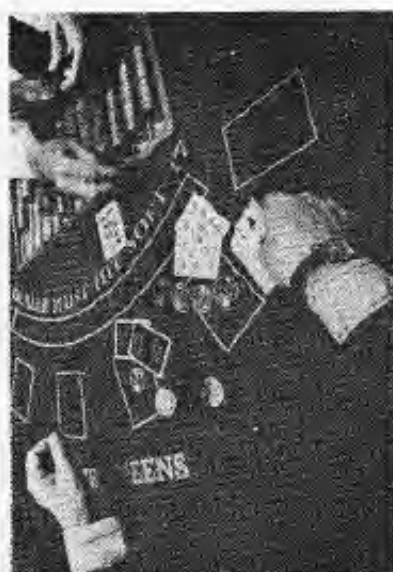
and sensual delights are as old as man himself, they were hitherto restrained by networks of social obligations. The complex web of social obligations were believed to have been ordained by God in some cultures, in others they were seen as expressions of an inherent cosmic order. In either case, the fulfillment of social obligations was considered to be more important than the aggrandisement of wealth, power or the pursuit of sensual pleasure.

Apart from this, there were always individuals who sought, what might be called freedom or salvation, and who willingly renounced 'worldly' pursuits such as interest in status and pleasure or even the fulfillment of social obligations. For

them, worldly pleasures were unsatisfying because of their ephemeral and quixotic character. All so called 'primitive' cultures venerated such individuals and their strivings even if the majority of people in these cultures were not willing to take on the rigours of such a spiritual path for themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that such strivings were present in a culture acted as a check to an undue importance being given to material pursuits. It thus

opened up a space within a culture and within the human mind.

Precisely this space has been choked by modern intellectual and scientific currents. Modern science has emerged out of the Western cultural matrix. This matrix was shaped by western Christianity, which was marked from its very inception by the tendency to suppress all mystic currents both within and outside its fold. Nevertheless, contemplative orders continued to exert an influence within the Church for a long while. Catholicism threw up such profound figures like St. Francis of Assisi and Meister Eckhart. The latter was tried by the Inquisition during his lifetime as a heretic. It is now well known that the so called witch-hunting was directed against women who practised forms of herbal and spiritual medicine thereby limiting the influence of the Church. By suppressing these knowledge systems and the mystic currents referred to earlier, the Church became



COURTESY SPAN MAGAZINE

*Currently, mankind is geared towards the pursuit of wealth, power and sensual pleasure and it is ruthless in this pursuit. It is not only these goals but the single-mindedness of the pursuit which lie at the heart of the violence. This single-mindedness allows no other aspirations to arise within the social matrix.*

cut off from potential sources of regeneration. This, in turn, paved the way, paradoxically enough, for the emergence of modern science. For, though modern science was opposed to specific teachings of the Church, it shared her dogmatic spirit in its rejection of all forms of knowledge which did not accept its implicit presuppositions about and orientation to the world.

Modern civilisation is thus characterised by the growing eclipse of this space, which we may call the dimension of freedom. This may sound strange because no previous age has spoken so much about freedom as our own. In fact, no age has been so lacking in freedom as ours. No previous age has seen the development of the 'herd-mentality' as it exists today. One has only to think of fascism, the peculiar phenomenon of modern sport, the football clubs of Europe, the impact of mass media in shaping public opin-

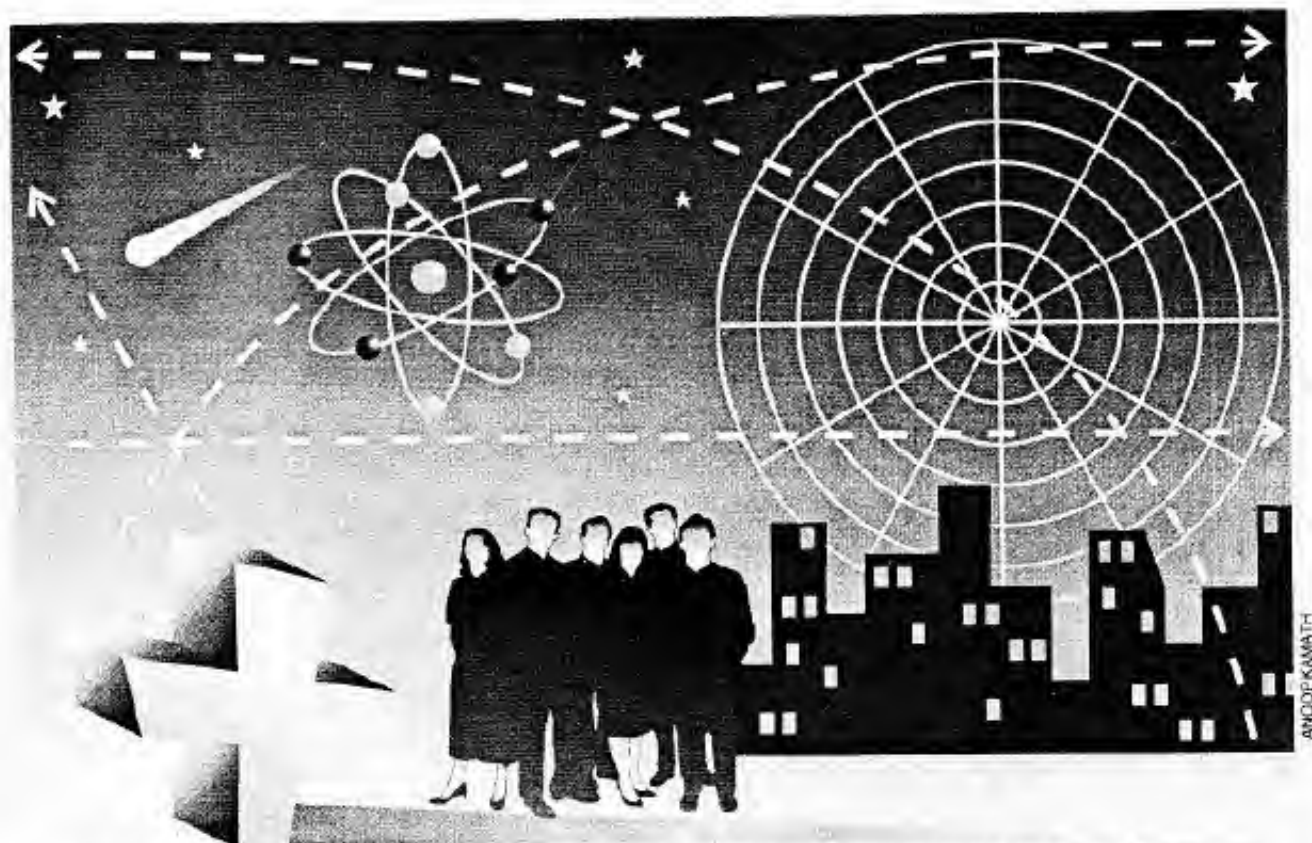
ion and the fashion industry to illustrate this herd mentality.

In the name of 'freedom of the individual' modern man rended the complex webs of social obligations that characterised traditional societies. In traditional societies, the striving for freedom meant the striving for a state, where, as it is said in the Bible, 'one is in the world, but not of it.' Denying the possibility of any such state of being, there remains no reason for today's man not to

pursue, singlemindedly, his own pleasure and profit. As an existentialist thinker once put it, 'If God is dead anything is permissible.'

Modern democracy is vaunted as the highest form of political freedom. It is founded on the notions of sovereignty and dominion. Both these notions were originally developed in the sphere of Christian theology. God's rule is absolute and his dominion just. With the eclipse of the Christian God, the notions of sovereignty and dominion did not disappear. They were merely removed from the sphere of religion and 'secularised', i.e. applied to the political sphere. Religion was banished from politics, but political life now had to carry the burden of religious concepts. If God does not exist and is not sovereign therefore, then somebody else has to be, unless you are willing to discard the notion of sovereignty. Who then could be sovereign? Why the 'people', of course! The people are sovereign and





*Modern science has emerged out of the western cultural matrix. This matrix was shaped by Western Christianity*

have **absolute** dominion over a territory. But how do you define a 'people' and how do you delimit their territory? The answers to this modern 'secular' question have stained the earth with more blood and suffering than the wars of all earlier ages put together: the European wars and the history of colonisation were among the first set of answers; Nazism, Stalinism and McCarthyism among the second; and the latest range from Serbianism right through to Khomeinism, Zionism, Sinhala-Tamil nationalism, Hindutva and various sons-of-the-soil nationalisms, the disintegration of the African continent and so on.

Let us now take a look at the nature of sensual pleasure in today's world. A profound shift has occurred. Aesthetic delight now becomes sense stimulation. What characterises sense-stimulation as opposed to aesthetic

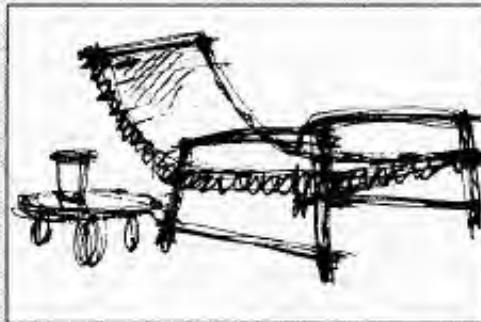
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delight is the constant need for more intense and spectacular forms of stimulation. The modern experience stresses on a momentary 'kick' largely available in sex and violence in film and literature, the spectacle of sport, advertising, adventure tourism, yellow journalism and so on. It stimulates, therefore the big-city syndrome, something which Marx declaims enthusiastically in the Communist Manifesto of 1848: 'The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the lure of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared to the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.'

## THE EASY CHAIR

When he was young  
he noticed his father  
use the easy chair.

When he married  
he took it home  
as his father's possession.



RIPIN KALRA

When his sons admitted him  
to an old age home  
he did not forget the chair.

Today in the living room  
of his only grandson  
hangs his picture...  
above the easy chair.

*Geeta Ramanujam  
The Valley School,  
Bangalore.*

## SILENCE

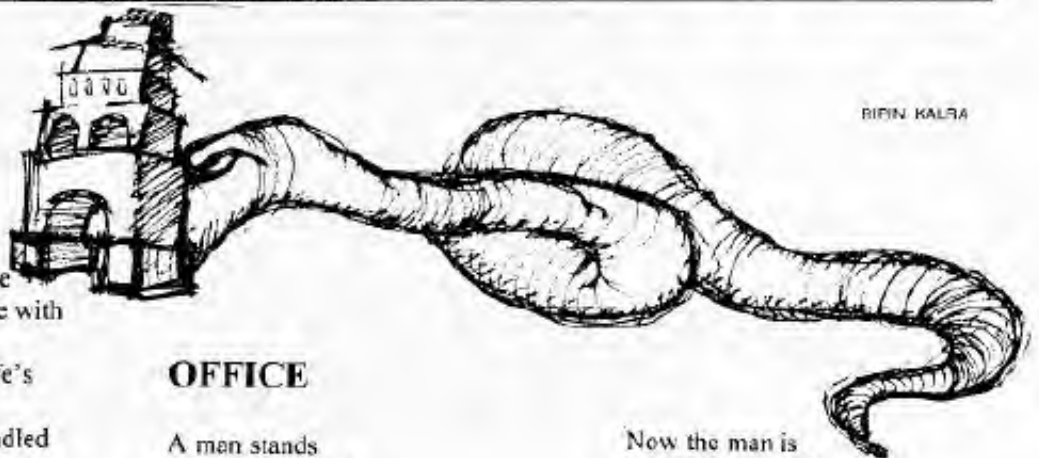
O silence  
father to the poetry I conceive  
Today again I am face to face with  
you.  
Together we have been on life's  
hardest toils  
when the flame of hope dwindled  
in the pregnant darkness of  
uncertainty.  
We met and understood each other.

In you I found loftiest of company  
and untold truths  
and meanings of melodies.

The same note stikes today  
at this lonely evening hour  
warm not melancholy,  
cool not cold,  
green not yellow  
is the note.

Clouds of coloured dreams pass over  
the sky,  
changing the shades of Sabarmati,  
Birds chip in retiring clamour  
The landscape is still...  
With the lighting of first candle  
in distant hut  
I am awake  
into the next morning.

*Manoj Kothari  
National Institute of Design,  
Ahmedabad.*



RIPIN KALRA

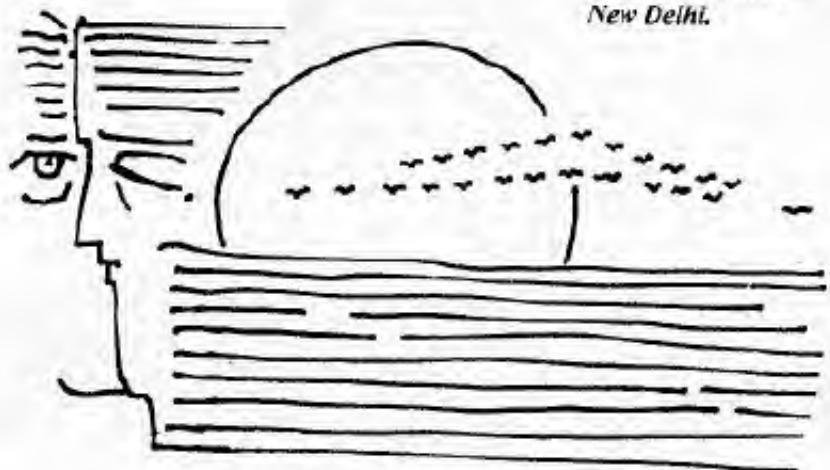
## OFFICE

A man stands  
On the threshold  
Of a large building  
Awed by its enormity,  
Eyes beaming,  
Mind rehearsing visions of the  
future.

Now the man is  
Standing in the doorway  
Thinking nothing  
But of the daylong work  
Eyes betraying apprehension.  
The man has walked in  
And has disappeared.

The building has eaten the man.

*Vivek Gupta  
All India Institute of  
Medical Sciences,  
New Delhi.*



MANOJ KOTHARI

# THE ROLE OF VIOLENCE IN THE GROWTH AND DECAY OF CIVILISATIONS

*Brigadier R.B.Nayar*

*Why do great civilisations collapse? This is a subject, the study of which has kept half of mankind (and printing presses) occupied for thousands of years. The reasons are many - strategic or economic weakness, softening of human calibre due to over indulgence, ecological ignorance or militaristic excess. But what of pure violence? The effort, in this article, is not to delve into the psychological or pathological study of violence, but to draw up a quick round up of instances of violence in older civilisations that stood high once and then why and how they fell. He asserts that while mankind has always been violent it has also created great thought and art having always drawn inspiration from the harmony of nature.*

**T**he colourful tales of history are those which tell us of violent deeds. Heroes of our ancient legends and conquerors of later years hailed 'great' by their own people, but hardly ever by the vanquished, have been organisers of violence. For over a century, during the days of the British Empire in India, it was necessary at all public functions to pay homage to the King Emperor.

This was done through singing the British national anthem, hoping and praying that the 'gracious and noble King' (Emperor) remained in a 'happy and glorious' state and 'victorious' (in battle, of course). The practice of destroying or demolishing enemies, always termed wicked and aggressive, was the duty of every king, warrior and citizen. Many years ago, I came across a man, Ripdaman Singh, whose British friends made a joke of his name giving a flourish to Ripdaman, calling him Damn Ripper. But Ripdaman went on to explain that the Sanskrit version of the name was *Ripu-daman* which meant blaster of enemies; he added for effect (quite incorrectly) that he came from the warrior class who were traditionally violent enemy-blasters. "Oh really?" From then on, no one pulled Ripdaman's legs.

Blasting of enemies was a princely pastime. And blasting of enemies, like blasting everything else was not done by gentle persuasion. The greatest acts of diplomacy, therefore, only seem to extend the interval of peace between two wars, not to avoid them. Only this can explain why since the beginning of

our 'civilised' existence many thousands of major and minor wars have been fought and today there are over a hundred confrontations diplomatically termed, 'conflicts.' The use of violence between groups, countries or nations has never had a break.

In our cosy world of make-believe, most of us believe what we like to and ignore what we do not. It is to be doubted if there were ever any bastions



of non-violence in India. We have, indeed, accepted non-violence as a desirable ideal especially as seen in Jain religious lore. It is of interest to note that there is a *puranic* character, Sanatkumar who was an ideal human being in all respects, and was born to Virtue out of Non-Violence. The average Indian, however, does not seem to share his ideals with Sanatkumar.



## Definitions

The subject of this essay has two operative words - **violence** and **civilisation**, each in its own way having the widest import. Force used unlawfully or unnecessarily is violence. If peace is neutralised, it is violence; so is silence torn asunder. The use of some kind of force or pressure is always involved in a violent act. External force acting on your mind, or the exertion of pressure on your thoughts should also fall within the wider meaning of violence. Words can be violent, they violate peace and break down your *shanti*.

The word 'civilisation' has no fixed meaning. In the 19th century, civilisation meant 'the growth and knowledge and skill that encouraged men to attain civilised behaviour.' From what little we know of past civilisations they have had four elements. Economic provision, political organisation, moral conditions and the pursuit of knowledge and the arts.

Each civilisation is an effort to perform an act of creation, an act of refinement, in which mankind tries to reach above primitive humanity to some higher kind of spiritual life. According to historian Arnold Toynbee, civilisation is a movement, not a static condition. It is a voyage, not a harbour — couldn't its inclination towards violence be one of the reasons? It is only man, the by-product of civilisation, that has made conflict a fine art and violence its hand-maid. World history is a monotonously repetitive account of the rise and fall of civilisations or nations.

## Some ancient civilisations

All legal codes of old had to lay down a scale of punishments. One of the oldest we know, the code of the Babylonian King, Hammurabi, prescribed equivalent retaliatory action, i.e. an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth — 'If a man brings an accusation against another, of capital crime, but

cannot prove it, the accuser shall be put to death'. We are also told that there is no evidence of lawyers in Babylonia and this is not surprising. For comparison we have our code of Manu, the ancient Indian law-giver. To take a look at the scale of punishments in the code of Manu:

'The highest punishment is awarded for killing a priest or a Brahmin; but you can kill a ruler and you only get a fourth of this punishment. If you kill a commoner, one eighth of this punishment, and if you kill a servant, your punishment is scaled down to 1/16th of the punishment for killing a Brahmin. It is reasonable to assume that the law giver was a Brahmin.

There is a known history of civilisations of West Asia alone, dating from something like 5000 years before Christ. Noted among these are, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian and in later years, the Jewish civilisation, not to speak of ancient Egypt. Great achievements have been attributed to these cultures in various fields of human

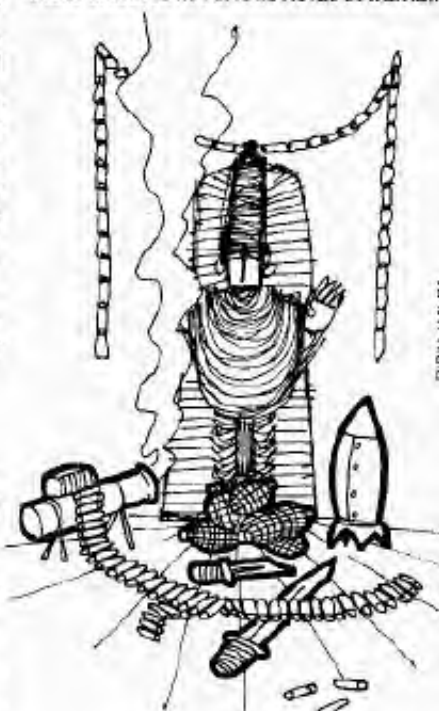


activity — the arts, architecture, administration and defence.

But, civilisation, like life, is a perpetual struggle with decay and death. And, as life maintains itself only by abandoning the old, and recasting itself in younger and fresher forms, so civilisation achieves a precarious survival by changing its habitats. For example, no one would believe today that the hot and arid desert along the river Euphrates was the rich and powerful capital of the Babylonian civilisation which (almost) created astronomy, added richly to the progress of medicine, established the science of language, prepared the first great codes of law, taught the Greeks the rudiments of mathematics, physics and philosophy, gave the Jews the mythology which it gave the world, and passed on to the Arabs, part of that scientific and architectural lore, with which they aroused the dormant soul of medieval Europe.

## Rise and fall

But, it is almost a law of history that the same wealth that generates a



RIPIN KALRA



Most of fiction is spiced with violence and modern cinema is colourless without it.

civilisation announces its decay. For, wealth produces ease as well as art; it softens people to the ways of luxury and peace and invites invasion from stronger arms and hungrier mouths. Aggressors soon overpower the defenders plundering and raiding the country again and again, to finally settle down as conquerors and rulers.

Around 700 BC, Corinth in Greece was the richest and most cultured centre. There is Biblical reference to Corinth. St. Paul, in his *First Epistle to Corinthians* denounced the thousands of courtesans in the palace. Two hundred years later, Corinth had a population of 50,000 free citizens and 60,000 slaves. The violence of slavery and the consequent augmenting of human power may have sounded the first peal of the decline of this civilisation.

Ashoka in 272 BC, became heir to the throne of an empire covering almost the whole of the Indian subcontinent together with Baluchistan and Afghanistan. It is said that for a time he ruled cruelly but well and we have accounts of all imaginable tortures to which his prisoners were subjected. He mounted a great campaign in Kalinga in which thousands of men were

slaughtered. As the story goes, he was suddenly overtaken by remorse and restored their land to the Kalingas, joined the Buddhist order, wore a monk's garb and entered the 'ten fold noble way' — he had vainly imagined his Law of Piety would hold good in his empire till the end of time. But in his last years the emperor was deposed by his grandson, and within a generation the Ashokan empire crumbled to pieces, proving the political maxim that 'States are not built on ideals, but on the nature of men'.

Since the era of pre-Christian civilisations we have travelled thousands of years in time. But how far have we been drawn away from such unparalleled barbarism? The post-Christian era has little to boast of. On the other hand, we seem to have drawn inspiration from the violence of our ancestors. The medieval wars of the Eastern hemisphere and the pointless violence, the use of slaves all over the world, saints being incarcerated or burnt at the stake in Europe, the plunder and loot of each other's ships on the Atlantic, colonial cruelty which lasted some three or four hundred years, the intolerance and the desecration of Indian places

of worship by waves of invaders, the untold misery of the prisoners of war in the German (Nazi) and Japanese prisoner of war camps — all these only show that we seem to have been inspired by the violence of our ancestors.

### Harmony in Nature - Contra indications of violence

As we recall countless tales of violence in the unfolding of human history, we should remember that alongside such violence has stood the creative features of civilisation and all the beauty and order one can see in creation. While nature itself plays games of destruction and survival

we should not only note the beauty and symmetry around us but also the fact that every object created, be it a worm or a bird or an animal or man itself is a master-piece of technical genius. Nature splitting white light into a great many tones and tints and distributing them all over plant and animal worlds so artistically, so liberally, so aesthetically; surely, Nature is not a miserly old thing. Her wonders never cease. It is out of such wonder at Nature's secrets which she often holds close to her heart that some glorious hymns of the *Rig Veda* originated. We





should not therefore forget the achievements of free minds, non violent minds.

*Who really knows, who could here proclaim*

*Whence this creation flows, where is its origin*

*With this great surge the Gods made their appearance*

*Who therefore knows from where it did arise?*

And again:

*The flow of creation, from where did it arise?*

*Whether it was ordered — or was it not  
He the observer in the highest Heaven  
He alone knows! — unless — he knows it not!*

Some two thousand years before Christ, when these lines were produced, the wonder that overtook the authors is still with us, as we are unable to unravel the mystery of creation. It is a modern thinker who for years tried to understand the purpose of creation, but before giving up his effort, came up with a cryptic statement — The universe was like a vital document that was dictated by someone very powerful and authentic but, *not a signed one*. There is so much in it for every one but no one would take the responsibility!

### Fundamentalism and violence

Why these Vedic hymns just quoted should be considered a precious legacy is that they are the very opposite of dogma and fundamentalism. This is relevant to our subject, as dogma and fundamentalism have contributed largely to violence and unless these are toned down, if not eliminated, can we root out violence? Since the days of the Vedic speculation by free minds mentioned above, centuries before any of our known religions came about, we have had the atmosphere continuously fouled up. What is the future, at least for this country?

Fundamentalism and fanaticism

have, in no small measure used violence as a tool, especially in the last few decades of this century. This is an area which has to be tackled to keep violence under control — but we are up against Winston Churchill's definition of the fanatic — that he is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject!

### Conclusion

While discussing violence we have to address ourselves a few more questions. Fishing, whaling, shooting of birds and butchery have in them positive elements of violence. Merely because the vast majority of human-kind have a vital interest in these acts, namely the interest of survival, do these acts shed their violent aspect? If not, how do we deal with these acts? Are those who tolerate these acts qualified to dissuade others from similar acts of violence?

Most of fiction today is spiced with violence and modern cinema is colourless without it. The greatest theatre is often one which depicts violence in thought and action. Even children's entertainment, in the form imported from the west is not free of violence. How, then, do we contend with these facts?

As the media, the written word, cinema and T.V. have grabbed young minds, the problem gets very difficult. Should we therefore, conclude this essay on the logical, but unpleasant, hopeless note or should we agree with the great French explorer Jacques Cousteau who says: "If we were logical, we are human beings and we have faith and we have hope and we shall not fail." Perhaps, we must all share his faith and hope and optimism; we must look for the light at the end of the tunnel. Mahatma Gandhi, in a brief but thought-provoking sentence said:

"There is hope for a violent person to become non-violent, but there is none for a coward".

But we are ignoring the interest of politics and politicians everywhere, in

keeping conflicts and all the accompanying violence alive. Whatever be the cost in money and man power, the military-industrial-machine and this civilisation have to be kept going. This leads us to another little story:

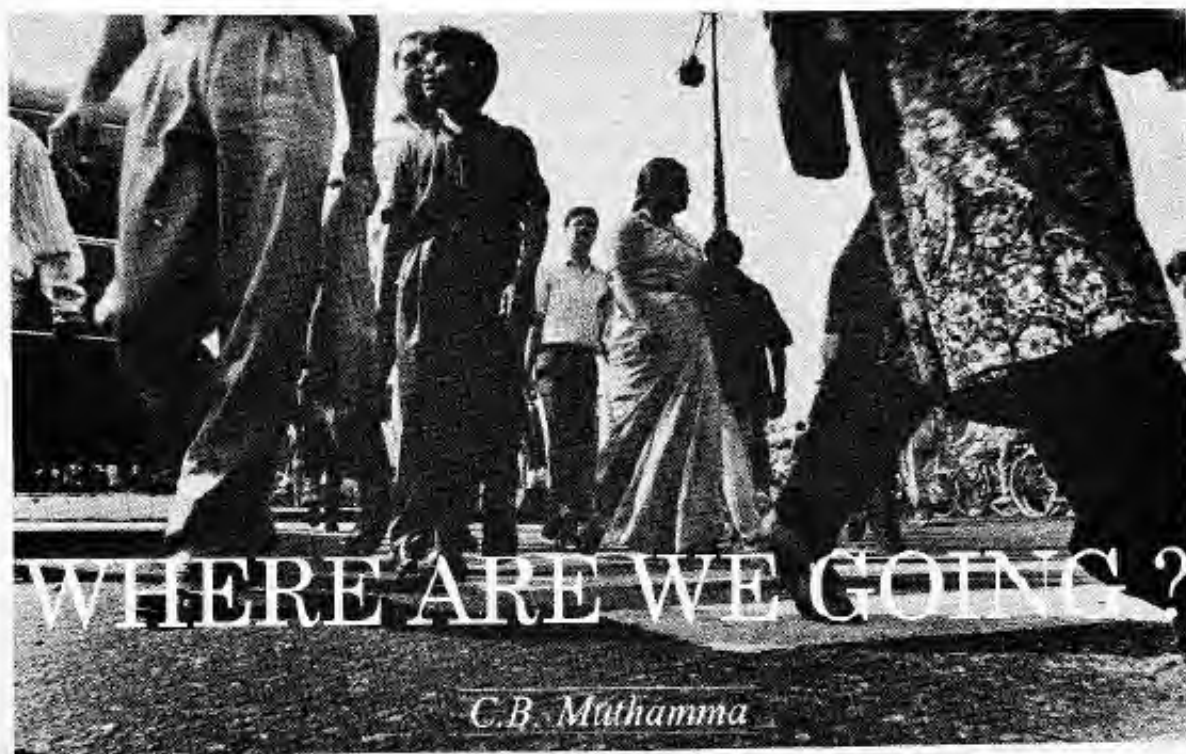
It is about the days when domesticated animals were used in military campaigns. There was this horse, cow and donkey who were war-veterans, who at the end of a long campaign, got together and argued. Who amongst the three had made the greatest contribution to the war effort? The horse said that he had made it possible for sliders to go off to war and the cow argued that she kept the civilian population alive. The donkey claimed the greatest recognition, for he said, "You talk of war efforts...if I had not been at the head of governments, there would not have been a war!". □



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GURINDER OSAN

*Nearly fifty years after independence, we still don't know which way we are headed. We think we do, but do we really? The true potential of India is being strangled by a political system that has far reaching implications on the socio-economic, educational and spiritual direction of this country. The author, in her trademark 'no-fuss' style, while looking at the myriads of problems that India is facing, also challenges us to believe that a solution is possible. If we don't do something soon, we have only ourselves to blame. To begin with, how about a national ideology, character, and a political agenda for positive change?*

**A**t Independence, India faced many problems. The partition and its traumatic aftermath left the longer-term problem of restoring normal, constructive, co-operative and amicable relations between the Muslims and the rest, so that the nation could go forward. There were other problems - poverty, illiteracy, the oppression of the underprivileged classes, such as the untouchables. Some of the problems were the products of the destabilisation of traditional societies. For instance, at a given period, the provision of skills for gaining a livelihood and the instilling of values and norms for the

orderly functioning of society, were ensured without literacy; crafts and skills were handed over within the family and caste; traditions and values, and people's intellectual and spiritual heritage were imparted orally. But in a changing society, that pattern was becoming less and less viable, and literacy as an instrument, on the one hand, for acquiring skills and knowledge, and, on the other, for conditioning the mind in a socially constructive way, had acquired the greatest importance. There were other problems, arising from ossified ancient traditions and religious beliefs gone sour, such as the oppression of women,

and unspeakable horrors like *sati*, and, here and there, even human sacrifice. One could add to the list.

On the other hand, India inherited some signal advantages, which were not as visible as the problems. For one thing, India had a diversity of races, religions, philosophies, ethnicities, languages and so on, which was without a parallel in the world. India, more than any other country, accepted in theory and practice the principle that diversity is normal, not uniformity. It was a situation in which the West's long tradition of anti-Semitism, culminating in a Hitler with his anti-Jewish pogroms, would have been

impossible. At a time when Senator MacCarthy was hounding out suspected communists or leftists of the mildest hue, India was electing communist governments within a democratic framework.

This acceptance of diversity, the acceptance that people can be different in their ways and their beliefs, is the root and basis of India's democracy. This is what enabled India, notwithstanding partition, to include in its national structure the Muslim community. There is innate wisdom in the recognition that you cannot have a nation or a country if its people are

evolved ethical, social and aesthetic codes which are still valid. Concepts like *dharma* are unique, sophisticated, and all-embracing.

The people of India are intelligent and hard-working, and, given the right environment, loyal, disciplined, and capable of facing great hardships if the goal demands it, as was proven not very long ago during the freedom movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Whether we are looking at what is wrong with India or what is right with it, we are looking at people. If we are talking about progress, we are talking

opportunities, with their heritage and their many qualities, they would have overcome their problems and built a prosperous, progressive and peaceful nation.

In the forty eight years of our Independence—nearly half a century—what is our record?

According to the experts, both national and international, roughly two-thirds of our people are poor in different degrees. This includes a rough two-fifths of the total population below the poverty line. We have one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world.

Consider what this involves. In different degrees, the vast majority of



Empowerment of our women — a long way to go.



constantly divided by hatred or conflict, rather than uniting for mutual progress. A rejection of that philosophy is what produces the Yugo-slavas and the Rwandas.

Then again, diversity is a philosophical necessity, if the heart and mind are not to be clouded by a narrow vision. There is a poem by Rupert Brooke, titled *Heaven*. In it a fish sees heaven as a place with the fattest flies and the slimiest slime, and God as the biggest fish of all. Very valid, if you are a fish and cannot think of other forms of existence.

India has a civilisation, which has

***Whether we are looking at what is wrong with India or what is right with it, we are looking at people. If we are talking about progress, we are talking of upgrading the people, so the first priority in our plan for development is necessarily our people.***

of upgrading the people, so the first priority in our plan for development is necessarily our people. If the people of India had been given the right

our people are underfed. Every year we even see reports of starvation deaths in some notorious areas like Kalahandi. Those who do not die suffer from diseases of malnutrition, including brain-damage, and have under-developed bodies and faculties. We have a large population of children blinded by malnutrition, some of which could have been remedied at minimal cost if the children and their parents were not also illiterate and ignorant. There is massive suffering caused by the hell-for-leather money makers setting up polluting industries or selling adulterated food. This is under-written

by our present national philosophy of counting development in terms of investment and profit. Thus if millions of hectares of forest are destroyed for match or paper factories and our priceless ecological resources destroyed; and millions of inoffensive and helpless tribals rendered utterly destitute, the money input-output statistics are what will carry the day.

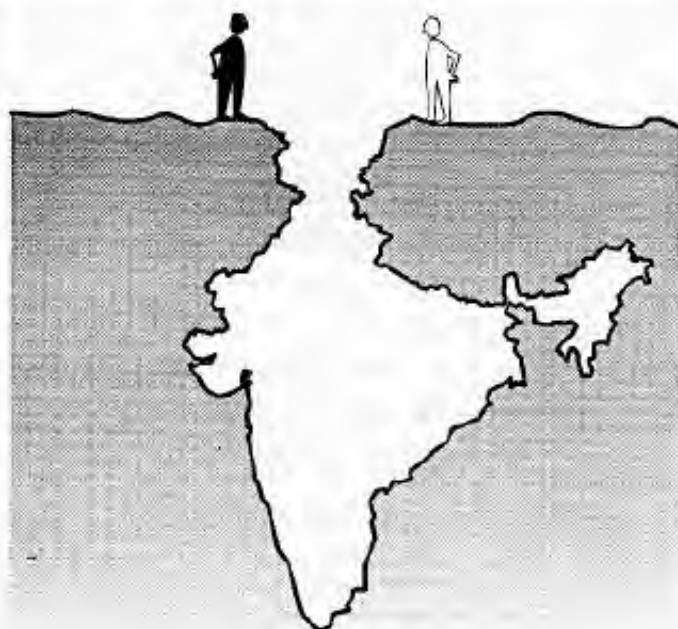
Again, according to the experts, about half the population is illiterate. You cannot teach them skills to meet the needs of a modern economy, and equally you cannot condition them to modern social codes such as the rejection of child marriages and *sati*. It is not an accident that these practices prevail in the most illiterate of our states.

Education is obviously the key to the solution of some of our basic problems. If the constitutional directive of compulsory universal school education had been carried out, everyone who was around six years old at Independence and everyone born after them — i.e. the entire present population in their mid-fifties and below — would by now have been literate. Untouchability and backwardness of various sorts, would have disappeared. The unseen barriers between religious, caste, or other groupings would have gone. Women would have grown into a different role and the men would have grown to accept a different status for women. We would have also contained the run-away growth of population. The correlation between education and economic progress and the containment of population growth is well established.

A well-planned education system would have helped us to preserve all

*When the British were here, the gulf between them and us was so great that they could not touch our culture; but now our own people are destroying it.*

that is valuable and precious in our own heritage and added to it whatever of value we could acquire from the rest of the world. We would have brought



ARJUN KAMATH

up a new Indian, and through him, a new India.

None of these things has happened. We have spent nearly half a century building a sub-standard nation, primarily because we have produced a sub-standard people. We are at the top of the world's negative list not only with one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world and highest illiteracy rate, but also other negative indicators like child labour, bonded labour and the poor quality of life.

Those who are considered the elite of this country have acquired a so-

called 'Westernisation' which in essence is synonymous with a rejection of this country and its heritage and civilisation. Our colonial masters had a patronising contempt for things Indian, and the post independence elite has improved on it to have arrived at a total self-contempt. They take pride in not knowing Indian languages or the intellectual and spiritual heritage locked up in those languages; and, not surprisingly, have no understanding of India. Rukmini Devi Arundale, a great figure of the Indian cultural renaissance, was asked whether she thought that the British had destroyed our culture. She replied that when the British were here, the gulf between them and us was so great that they could not touch our culture; but now our own people were destroying it.

Over this situation is let loose the consumer culture, predicated on the western capitalist philosophy and life styles. Life is consumer-oriented and not only are a wide range of objects held up as desirable, but even sex, and women as sex objects, have become consumer items. Not

surprisingly, crime is growing qualitatively and quantitatively. Crimes like bride-burning are a post-independence phenomenon. Murder, rape, burglary and crimes of violence appear increasingly in the news; even institutions of the government, which are meant to shield the people against such crimes, such as the police, are involved in perpetrating them; and corruption at all levels of the administration victimises the citizen. The criminals are from different classes of society — college-going sons of upper-class people, are as often reported as



involved in these crimes, as organised hoodlums from lower down the socio-economic scale.

The people's prime instrument for the solution of problems is the government. But the government is burdened by a political structure in which the process of winning power by the parties is inevitably linked to anti-national methods. The parties are in perpetual rivalry and conflict, and this conflict is transmitted to the people, who are divided into sectoral vote-banks by the political parties. The community is thus divided into warring groups on the basis of language, religion, caste, or the recently invented 'forward vs backward' nexus. Reservation for the backward in professional colleges and administrative jobs is producing a negative impact in many directions. Without fully preparing the youth in mass at the school stage, the reservations at higher levels are bringing down the standards of both professional colleges and the administration. The beneficiaries of reservation constitute only a fraction of the underprivileged people. After over forty years of reservation for the untouchables, the large masses of them still remain untouchables. Universal school education would have achieved the objective long ago. If our present economic liberalisation does produce an expansion of industry and commerce, these people will not have been prepared to compete for these new opportunities. Under the present dispensation, the so-called 'forward' classes, largely excluded from the professional colleges, turn to commercialised private education, which is in the English medium from base upwards, ending up with an identification with the west, and as aliens in their own land. They emulate westernised life styles, which by now are recognised as being unviable even in the west. In this scenario, with a small elite opting for a western life style, with its high consumption

pattern, what future do we envisage for the deprived majority of the world, and especially, the deprived majority of the Indian population?

The political rivalries of our leaders not only divide the people, diverting their attention and efforts from constructive activity, but run a continuous programme of agitations, *bandhs* and strikes which stop productive activity, running into huge economic losses, not to mention the disruption of peaceful life.

The concentration of power at the centre and the state capitals deprive our people of freedom and initiative in tackling their own problems. It stands to reason that a few hundred thousands of politicians and bureaucrats in the Union capital or state capitals cannot

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substitute for the united efforts and initiative of the masses of people. The so-called 'Panchayat Government' recently ushered in, still leaves the reins of control firmly in the hands of the political parties and the central government.

We do not have policies that are essential to India in this time and age—a careful manpower planning, land—use planning, and the planning of national policies, with the implementation and the financial and political powers decentralised to the appropriate levels. This denial of freedom and progress creates constant upheavals right across the country, tuning to insurgency and secessionism in the border areas of the north-west and north-east.

It will be pointed out by some that there has been progress since

independence. But many newly independent countries have far outstripped us, especially in Asia; such progress as we have made is meaningless in the global perspective and in terms of our own needs. India seems to be drifting and those who run the affairs of this country do not seem to be in control of events. They make ad hoc decisions that have no reference to any over-all pattern.

The people and their leaders have to pool ideas to find alternative structures for functioning. If they do not find a way to realise India's high potential, they will only have themselves to blame. □



ANOO KAMATH

*Ms. Muthamma in her sixties is a remarkable woman. She is indefatigable in her efforts to draw the attention of the Indian people to what is greatly right and greatly wrong in this country. She is a supporter of small struggles, and speaks and writes passionately. Ms. Muthamma has the unique distinction of being the first career lady ambassador to represent India. She has been posted in that capacity all over the world. We wish her years and years of more energy, energy that she generously and willingly donates to what she believes.*

# IN PRAISE OF KNOWLEDGE

## It's time to move on from information

The information age may be at an end. Let's hope so, anyway. Though it has invariably been described as exciting — a word now applied to anything new, whether a corn flake or a challenge — it has in truth, been the opposite. It has provided every bore in the world with a limitless supply of the wherewithal to put his victims to sleep. Now, if a har-binger from a Japanese university proves correct, information is giving way to knowledge.

According to two Japanese researchers, you will not succeed in business unless you can create new knowledge. That is why, apparently, some companies already have 'Vice President, Knowledge'. They vice-preside not over the information-technology department, but over the hunches, skills and insights

of the work force. This is what is meant by knowledge.

Not perhaps by you. A hunch, after all, may be wrong; if so, it would be better than receiving or producing facts. The trouble with the information age is that it seems to place no value upon differentiation.

In this respect, it has been the first retrograde age in history — unless you consider its predecessor, the Age of Aquarius. Most people, however, prefer to see mankind's development as a slow progression towards something more sophisticated: stone age, iron age, bronze age, age of reason, age of enlightenment, age of analysis, age of — ough — information. In, with the computer, came the raw,

fact-filled oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

There's nothing wrong with information, of course, so long as you do not worship it. Every library needs a dictionary, a telephone directory, may be a *Wisden*; some people can even find a use for the Internet. And the more information around, of course, the greater the need for people to interpret it: *The Economist* can recognise a gift horse without inspecting its mouth. Still, facts and figures are generally best used as a drunk uses a lamp-post — for support rather than illumination — and the Japanese researchers are right in believing that information alone seldom produces great insights.

## Better informed but none the wiser

Hence another gloomy reflection on the information age: although there are almost as many people alive today as dead, most of the great thinkers, inventors, artists, philosophers and statesmen seem to be under the sod. An optical illusion? Maybe.

But perhaps the rate of increase of information, and even of knowledge, has not been matched by the rate of increase of wisdom.

Here surely is a subject clamouring for research: what is the relationship between knowledge and wisdom? If information is to knowledge as instruction is to education, what quality could provide the necessary leap to wisdom? Many questions will have to be asked, many answers weighed, many reports written; a new knowledge-based industry may arise. When the answer is found, it will be a breakthrough, perhaps even an exciting one. Roll on the age of the sage. □

Courtesy: *The Economist*,  
Illustration: Ripin Kalra



untreated flow of data: out, at least by implication, went the ability to discriminate between useful and useless, good and bad, interesting and dull. With that, the seven ages of mankind suddenly started to look like the seven ages of man: a circular progression towards the stone-age starting point, a

**M** For centuries, trade has been an essential part of the social fabric of civilisation. Aside from the material benefits of exchange and the opportunities to create wealth, trade brought understanding between diverse cultures, created peace in place of strife, and opened new doors of perception. Through the medium of trade we experienced the essential 'other' of different people, whilst bringing to the world the gift of our own speciality. What is happening now is entirely different. The ethics of the marketplace and free trade have become charters for a new multinational imperialism which has the potential to plunder the planet like no other force in history. Moreover, in their wake, multinational companies impose a bland monoculture which threatens the rich diversity of cultural history - you can buy a McDonald's in Moscow, Kentucky Fried Chicken in Beijing, or a Barbie Doll in Ladakh.

Multinational companies now control some 70% of world trade, and more than 90% of them have their headquarters in the industrial world. The combined sales of the world's largest 350 multinationals exceed the individual gross national products of all Third World nations. They operate on a vast scale in dozens of countries with thousands of employees. Pepsi Co, the world's biggest beverage company, has more than 500 plants, and 335,000 workers in over 100 countries. Multinational banks, investment brokers and the like now control the fate of nations. National currencies rise and fall according to how closely governments tailor their economic policies to the interest of giant corporations. With nearly one trillion dollars worth of currencies traded (speculated) on the financial markets each day (2% of which would finance total world trade), multinationals are free to set up production anywhere in the world and

## BEWARE MULTINATIONALS BEARING GIFTS

*Malcolm Baldwin*

benefit from lower wages wherever they are to be found. German cars are manufactured in Vietnam where wages can be as much as 47 times cheaper than in Europe, UK internal airline tickets are processed in Delhi, and the electronics industry constantly moves around the Asian Pacific rim in search of the cheapest labour force. Multinational companies offer little or no allegiance to the countries where they operate, they treat the world like a global chessboard bidding down wages and taxes, avoiding environmental regulation and plundering natural resources. It seems their sole motivation is profit, whatever the cost.

The stark reality of what some Christian theologians now call 'corporate sin' was brought home to me in 1990 when I read these words in the *Guardian*: 'The Swiss firm Ciba-Geigy, admitted in 1976 that it used Egyptian children in Alexandria to test its pesticide, Galecron, which was suspected of causing cancer. The children were stood in a field so that an aeroplane could

*It seems to me the essential question has not been asked — why is a Swiss food company concerned with selling baby care products in Uganda, Indonesia, Bolivia or India? Are their motives altruistic?*



spray them from the air with the chemical. Their urine was then tested for residues. In defence of its actions, which were exposed by a Third World pressure group, Ciba Geigy said that it had acted with the full consent of the Egyptian authorities.'

Such examples can be multiplied, but it is rare that such flagrant abuse can be identified. Normally the infiltration of Third World markets by multinationals is inordinately complex and requires a great deal of analysis. One such instance came to light in 1991 when the general synod of the Church of England urged a boycott of Nestlé products following United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) allegations that 1.5 million babies die each year because they are not breastfed. According to the The Baby Milk Action Group, Nestlé controls about half the global baby food market and their marketing





*These babies are twins. The baby with the bottle died the day after this photograph was taken, but her breastfed brother is thriving. This mother was told that she wouldn't have enough milk and so should bottle feed the girl. But she could almost certainly have fed both twins because the more a baby sucks, the more milk is produced. "Use my picture if it will help," she said. Baby Milk Action campaigns to protect a woman's right to an informed choice in all countries. Baby Milk Action, 23 St. Andrew's Street, Cambridge CB2 3AX. Tel: (01223) 464 420.*

strategies for selling breastmilk substitutes are often in violation of World Health Organisation (WHO) codes of conduct.

Essentially, the argument centres around allegations that breastmilk substitutes should not be promoted in countries where levels of poverty are such that they may be diluted with polluted water. In addition, there is concern that impoverished mothers may over-dilute the substitutes in order to save money, or simply not to be able to afford continual purchase of artificial formulas. Much of the debate centred around whether labelling with European graph-

ics and a text not in the local language might lead to terrible confusion with deadly consequences. Nestlé was accused and has denied as 'absolute rubbish' allegations that infant formulas were given as free samples, and that health workers who promote their products receive generous gifts. The Baby Milk Action Group accuses Nestlé of misinformation concerning the ability of poor mothers to breastfeed. A spokesman for Nestlé claims that it is every mother's right to choose whether to breastfeed or not.

Such is the nature of claim and counter-claim by the protagonists in this argument. On the one hand, there is the terrible statistic that one and half million babies die each year because they are not breastfed, and Nestlé's claim that they are providing a product for women who either cannot or choose not to breastfeed their babies. However, it seems to me the essential question has not been asked - why is a Swiss food company concerned with selling baby care products in Uganda, Indonesia, Bolivia or India? Are their motives altruistic? Are Indian mothers incapable of raising their children without European assistance? Are they really trying to help mothers who are unable to lactate? Or could it be that Nestlé wants to increase its share of the potential 180 million pounds market in India alone? Moreover, why is it that a reasonable company like Nestlé does not adopt the precautionary principle and withdraw its breastmilk substitutes pending a proper enquiry into UNICEF statistics? If, as they claim, there is no evidence to link their products to infant deaths, then surely this would be a public relations coup which would win confidence for their products all over the world.

Multinational companies will always claim that they simply provide products that people want, and that in a free market economy, people have the right to choose. The exploitation of people and the environment is hidden behind bright packaging and glossy advertising. The fact that a Eurocentric way of life is softly and sweetly being imposed on diverse cultures is rarely examined. We seldom question the fact that there are few areas of public or private space where multinationals do not intrude - their only motives being profit, power, and increased market share.

However, there are signs that ordinary people are beginning to assume control of their lives and resist multinational intrusion. Readers of this magazine do not need reminding of the Indian farmers' campaign against Cargill seeds. In Europe, recent pressure from Greenpeace highlighted the fact that disused oil installations were going to be dumped at sea. Following days of argument and debate a massive campaign



was launched to boycott Shell products. This resulted in the Shell oil company losing around ten million pounds a day. Previously unbowed by any reasoned arguments, they quickly succumbed to this economic pressure and the oil installation was towed ashore for subsequent disposal. This event demonstrated in a particularly vivid manner just how vulnerable multinationals are to consumer pressure.

It is not for me to say whether Indian mothers should or should not breastfeed their babies. Such talk would lay me open to accusations of cultural imperialism. All I can do is urge people everywhere to take charge of their economic and social destiny. First of all look at your local community and trade within it as much as possible. Keep wealth close to home. Where trade is necessary make sure that it is a fair

exchange and that multinationals under the guise of development are not exploiting people or the environment. Find out the relative amounts of wealth generated in the local community or being syphoned off to the rich industrial North. Make sure that any multinational investment is sustainable both in terms of natural resources and continued employment. Question the right of a multinational to intervene between a mother and the care of her infant. Do you really want a McDonald's or a Pizza Hut in every town and city? Would your life be totally impoverished without Kitkat bars or Coca Cola? Such questions are not easy to answer — gleaming facades and brightly packaged items may be hard to resist. However if you really want to see the other side of the multinational coin, try speaking to the residents of Bhopal. □

Sources: Baby Milk Action, New Internationalist, The Guardian, The Trap by James Goldsmith.

Malcolm Baldwin is a gifted teacher, writer and a dedicated environmentalist. Born in the U.K. he has a B.Ed degree from the University of Sussex. He has worked in theatre and as film editor mainly for BBC TV. He has been cameraman and director for several BBC productions. He is deeply committed to organisations such as Green Peace, Friends of the Earth, Environmental Investigation Agency, and has produced environmental educational material. Malcolm lives in Devon, UK.

Illustrations: Rishi Kalra

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## NETWORK WITH THE EYE !

*If you are an organisation wishing to give us a small write up about your work, we will be happy to publish it free of cost. They should concern the NGO/voluntary sector in any field and/or 'alternative' innovators working for the larger good of society. In case you want to be featured as a full length article, you may send us a well written article with good black and white photographs. Remember to highlight the work and not yourself! THE EYE travels quite a lot, so we invite you to ride piggy back on us.*

# WHO AM I!?

*Prem Kumar*

**A**fter living in Canada for twenty two years, I have just returned to India. Over the years, my identity labels have multiplied. Like everyone else, I was born with one identity - my parents'. Then I acquired some, yet others were bestowed on me. No wonder I suffer from an identity crisis occasionally. Let me explain.

In 1947, before India's partition, my father brought his young family from Lahore to East Punjab. After some trial and error, he decided to settle in Simla. He put me and my younger brother in a local elementary school. Soon, we were known as **refugee** boys. According to the newspapers of the day, our family, like others who migrated from Pakistan, were called **panha-ghazins**. In the claims that my father filed with the rehabilitation department, he was identified as a **displaced person**. Slowly we got used to these epithets.

After finishing college, I went to Canada for further studies. In Canada, I applied for and got Canadian immigration and for years I was referred to as a **landed immigrant**. Subsequently, I became a Canadian citizen and joined as an officer with the federal service. In government record, however, I was always identified as a **visible minority** Canadian.

As if these labels were not enough, my country folk in Canada created a national organisation to promote the well-being of Indians living in Canada. I joined it and came to be called **Indo-Canadian**. In the late 1980's, a racist Canadian political party - The Reformers, came into existence. It fought the



national election on the plank of reducing the immigration levels of **multiculturals**.

Leaving behind all this petty-fogging and convoluted rationale, I boarded a Cathay Pacific flight recently and landed in Hong Kong ten hours later. At the hotel reception desk, a pretty Chinese clerk beamed a smile as she looked at my passport. "You are a **Canadian**. My brother also lives in Vancouver", she said. We both smiled. At the Bombay hotel the next day, the clerk refused to accept payment in rupees. "You are a **phorner** and must pay in dollars", he insisted.

Finally, I reached my destination, New Delhi. I was delighted to meet my uncle, aunt and their children. In eight years since my last visit, these youngsters had blossomed into vivacious

young adults about to finish college. At the dinner table, my aunt, in a commanding tone posed the question, "Tell me Prem, will your children marry in Canada or India?" Before I could answer, she said, "You could, of course, get excellent matches in India. "Why so", I asked. "Well, you are an **NRI** (Non Resident Indian). People here are crazy about NRIs. Why, who wouldn't want to live in Canada?" she exclaimed.

Alone at night I counted my labels: refugee, displaced person, landed immigrant, visible minority, Canadian, Indo-Canadian, multicultural, foreigner, NRI. No wonder, sometimes I suffer from an identity crisis. □



*Prem Kumar holds graduate degrees from India and Canada. He is a professional environmentalist and a freelance writer.*

*Illustrations: Ripin Katra*



# New Amerithink

## A Small Collection Of Angst

**JERRY MANDER**

Senior Fellow at Public Media  
Center in San Francisco,  
the only non-profit  
ad agency in the country.

'There is no way like the American way' was a popular saying in the fifties. The poster showed a happy family sitting in their car smiling and waving their hands. Almost four decades later the whole world believes it is true. America beams into our homes, offices, stomachs, minds and souls. America is the secret fantasy of the Third World, the ultimate gratification. But amidst the bold and the beautiful and the young and restless, live the brave and the different. They express here what they feel about the way things are in their country. Could we, here in the Third World pay heed please? Here's what Star TV does not tell you. *The Utne Reader*, a wonderfully readable publication, calls itself *The Best of the Alternative Media*. And it certainly is. In their Jan/Feb '95 issue, they featured 100 visionaries. By definition these were not our typical office careerists but thinkers, scholars and doers. Three of these visionaries spell out their twentieth century American angst as also William J. Bennett of The Heritage Foundation.



**T**he media, academia, much of the activist community, and, consequently, the public have failed to address the profound negative consequences of the growing juggernaut of 'economic globalization.' The world's corporate and political leadership is undertaking a restructuring of global politics and economics that may prove as historically significant as any event since the industrial revolution. It is happening at tremendous speed, fed by the recently developed technologies of acceleration - computers, satellite communication, broadcast television, and robotics — but without public disclosure about the effects on democracy, human welfare, and the natural world.

Promoters of economic globalization hail NAFTA and GATT as panaceas, but do not explain the truly revolutionary changes that will take place: (1) the transfer of real political and economic power away from nation-states to transnational corporations and supranational bureaucracies; (2) the promotion of a development philosophy and practice that has already led us to the brink of global environmental breakdown; (3) rapidly declining wages and working conditions as corporations are free to move to wherever the conditions are best for the corporations; (4) the reinforcement of economic colonialization of the South by the North; (5) the destruction of small-scale community-based agriculture by the increased emphasis on mechanized, automated farms that don't require farmers, and by biotechnology that re-designs plant life; (6) massive population shifts from rural to urban areas with a commensurate increase in

friction and violence; and (7) worldwide homogenization of culture and landscape, and the creation of a global monoculture.

Soon there will be no reason to leave Phoenix to see Indonesia or Morocco, since those exotic places will look and be more and more like Phoenix. Everything is being remade in the Western image: the universal domination of culture.

Of course, the way to act on this is to reverse it, to become conscious of it and work to revitalize and re-empower local economies.

#### KATHA POLLITT

*Author, poet, essayist and feminist thinker*

My main concern is the growing poverty and degradation of life I see around me every day. The United States seems to be writing off ever larger numbers of people — the homeless, the mentally ill, the long-term unemployed, low-wage workers, innercity teenagers, women on welfare and their children. What I find particularly depressing is the enthusiastic part played in the writing-off process by many public intellectuals and former liberals who have persuaded themselves that poverty is caused by the moral failings of poor people.

I fear we are in for an era of real social cruelty, conducted under the banner of national moral rearmament. An era of prisons and sermons — which, as William Black pointed out, usually go together.

#### MICHAEL VENTURA

*Writer and columnist for the Austin Chronicle and LA Village View*

What is considered 'normal life' in America now is a waste of time — a waste of one's life: working at a job you don't like and in which you have no say; a job that leaves you little time for yourself and little pride in yourself;



working for scant reward, and for the profit of people who usually don't care for you; at a job with no security; a job that usually contributes to the waste of the very environment you depend upon; and all the while bombarded by media that trivialize everything they touch. The average working couple spends 20 minutes a day together. The average father talks to his child for 10 minutes a week. To call this 'the sharing of lives' is ludicrous. It is, instead, a collective state of being caught in a maze — a maze in which great and brave effort produces little result, where there's little time to reflect and less to be free.

The discourse of America is done largely by a very few who, by luck or work or privilege, aren't caught in this maze. Too much of our time and thought is spent on saving and/or reforming an economic and political system that has constructed, and cannot live without, the maze. Patchwork reform won't help; violent revolution is madness; and most Americans feel so bound to the wastage that they have to defend it, and are increasingly hostile to its critics. But many are crying out against the waste of their lives. As for me, directly or indirectly, whether the subject is culture, politics, or spirituality, I write for people who don't want to waste their lives anymore — for people who, while they must live in this civilization, no longer feel bound to be loyal to it; for

people who have left, or are eager to leave, the maze. There's nowhere else to live, but there are other ways to be. This is my hope, my faith, and my commitment, and I write to investigate its possibilities, asking every day a question that Texas country singer Butch Hancock asks in one of his songs: "Where do you go when you're already gone?"

**WILLIAM J BENNETT**  
A STRATEGY FOR  
TRANSFORMING AMERICA'S  
CULTURE  
FRIENDSHIP IN THE GOOD  
(Distinguished Fellow at the  
Heritage Foundation)

(Delivered at The Heritage Foundation's Annual Board Meeting and Public Policy Seminar, Amelia Island, Florida, April 16, 1994).

Printed below is a very brief extract from the speech.

When I talked to many of you last December, it was about the spiritual, moral, and political problems of our country. Let me briefly summarize what I said then. Current trends in out-of-wedlock births, crime, drug use, family decomposition, and educational decline, as well as a host of other social pathologies, are incompatible with the continuation of American society as we know it. If these things continue, the republic as we know it will cease to be. The trends are dangerous and they are potentially catastrophic. That is the hard truth of our time — and I believe it needs to be said.

The questions that I have been asked most often about it are, "Are you that pessimistic? And, do you think we can pull it out of the fire?" The answer to both is yes.

I am that pessimistic; I think things are very serious. But I also think that we can pull it out of the fire, primarily because there is such a thing as the American capacity for self-renewal, and because we have faced and



overcome enormous challenges before. But in many ways, this one is different. This is about the soul of the country. But yes, I believe we can overcome this too.

And finally, we need to "spiritualize." The (spiritual) question we need to answer is, who are we? What do we think we are? One of the reasons that we have had so many social problems during the last quarter-century is because the philosophy that motivates a lot of Americans has changed.

Now most people don't pursue philosophy in an active sense. They just sort of take in what is around them, and they proceed. But I submit to you that thirty years ago everybody knew that the purpose of education was the moral and intellectual development of the young. We attended to the moral because we believed children to be moral and spiritual beings, made in the image of God.

I am always embarrassing the National Education Association by holding up their documents from the 1950s which support the ideal of moral and intellectual development, about the importance of teachers being good role models, and which stated that the ultimate responsibility of the teacher is to be a good example to the young.

Many of these things we regard as ancient history. But are they so ancient? This was only thirty years ago, and

yet it was understood by everyone involved in education that yes, we were involved in helping children to become smarter, but we were also committed to making them better; we were engaged in the architecture of the soul. And now we have debased the language and idea of education, in which teachers often talk about themselves as people who are engaged in 'skills acquisition' and teaching children 'self-esteem.' Teachers are not engaged in 'skills acquisition,' they are engaged in the task of shaping souls, of shaping young lives. That is what true education is about.

So, we have to come clean; we have

***And now we have debased the language and idea of education, in which teachers often talk about themselves as people who are engaged in 'skills acquisition' and teaching children 'self-esteem.' Teachers are not engaged in 'skills acquisition,' they are engaged in the task of shaping souls, of shaping young lives. That is what true education is about.***

to remember; we have to recall who we are — and then we have to adjust our behavior on that basis. Are we spiritual beings, or not?

What is the philosophy today? For a large part of the population, particularly our young people, I think the modern philosophy is captured by three simple words. It is an advertisement, maybe the most popular advertisement out there: 'JUST DO IT'. Does it make any difference if twenty or thirty million people are running around the country who believe the purpose of life is the great commandment or, on the other hand, if they believe the purpose of life is to 'just do it'? The transition point (and this may be cheap

sociology, in my view) is the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company ad of the 1960s. Do you remember what it said — this bridge between theology and the popular culture? It said, 'You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can.' Now Schlitz makes fine beer — I've had a few myself — but how do they know we only go around once. Where did that view come from? Why not, 'You only go around once, so live your life with dignity, with honor and die well-thought-of by your fellow men,' which is something the Romans might have said.

*The Book of Virtues* has gotten an amazing response from little boys from stories like *Horatius at the Bridge* and the *Pass of Thermopylae*. I ask our son John, "What do you want to read?" He says, "Read me one of those Greek or Roman stories." When I studied Latin as a child we read all of those stories, and the vocabulary lessons were about honor and valor. There's an interesting word. I used the word 'valor' on a talk show the other night and I thought they were going to pass out.

A second word I used was 'inhibit.' We have to have proper respect for the inhibition of one's impulses, and this had not occurred to the interviewer. All of Western civilization has been built on inhibition, that you have to inhibit some things at least sometimes. But there are people abroad in our society in positions of influence who are not sure we should ever inhibit. That is extraordinary.

As I said, what this finally turns on is a philosophy of life. But for those of us who believe, who look at our children and see something very precious — it seems to me that is where we make our stand.

A few brief closing thoughts. As we join the battle, be of good cheer. The fight for our children and our culture is a fight worth being in. I thought Bob Woodson's presentation was wonderful not only for its religious and moral depth and the practicality of his stories, but because of his good cheer. The



mood of the country very often wants to be darker. Lots of people think it is sophisticated to be darker, to be down, to be maudlin. College students certainly think so. I remember when I was a college student, I put on a black turtleneck and quoted French poetry - specifically, Baudelaire - all the time. I remember one thing he wrote:

"Life is a hospital, in which each patient believes he will be better if he is moved to another bed."

This is all very French, very fashionable, very New Yorker, and it appeals to undergraduates. It was the sort of thing you said to a Bennington girl in hopes that you would persuade her you were more than a big-lug of a football player. But we should do better. We should be of good cheer. There is a distinction between theoretical pessimism and practical optimism. Theoretical pessimism is found in the

book of Isaiah. And I guess I am something of a theoretical pessimist - that is, in the end it is all wind and ashes, all our institutions, everything. But practical optimism is getting up in the morning thinking how you can improve things.

And the last thing I want to say is, how we get there depends a lot on our hearts and on our encouragements. And I want to close tonight and this very special weekend by recalling Aristotle on friendship. Aristotle says there are three kinds of friendship. There are friendships we have because people give us pleasure. They make us laugh. They are engaging, and that is a good kind of friendship.

A second kind of friendship is one of utility. They are people who are useful to us, who help us to get jobs, lend us rakes, fix power mowers, and do other things that we cannot do so

well. Many of our neighbors fall into this group.

But there is a third kind of friendship, friendship in the good. That is based on the pursuit of a common aim, and it is larger than the two friends themselves. It lifts people to another level, to live for something beyond the purview of one's own life. And Aristotle says this kind of friendship is the best because in it, one is friends for a larger, common purpose. It encourages us about life generally, and it ennobles us. This is the friendship of the admirable. This is the friendship where one seeks out another person because their company makes you better for having been there. And that is the kind of common company and common cause that we make up here. □

*Illustration: Anoop Kamath*

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# LORE OF THE LAND

## Saving The Host (Khasi)

*Retold by Angela Paswet*

*If I were an (ill read) visitor to India, one possible question that would spring to mind (apart from several others) could be, why in heaven do these people drink blood, and if they want to keep spitting it out, why bother? The answer, (as someone would quietly explain) would be, it's not blood my friend, just a leaf and nut. And just why do you eat it? Well, there are several reasons, one of them's right here below...*

*This quaint little tale is from Meghalaya, land of the Khasi and Jaintia hills, home to the War, Pnar Bhoi and Khasi tribes and inveterate chewers of betel leaf and nut. The tale lifts up the dignity and prestige of the betel leaf and nut, accords it with an almost Hellenic tragic quality, and saves its honour with fatalistic finesse.*

*The provinces of Meghalaya bordering Bangladesh in North East India, known as 'War' (which includes War Dawki and War Sohra) are prime betel nut growing areas and supply their neighbouring states.*

**L**ong ago, in a small village called Ranglywrit with only a few huts, there lived a couple named U Shing and Ka Lak who were orphans and earned their living by working as coolies. In the same village there lived a rich man U Nik Mahajon who was a friend of the couple. The poor couple often called on U Nik Mahajon's house and dined with him on several occasions. As days and months went by, their friendship grew richer and deeper.

One day, U Nik Mahajon called on U Shing's house. The couple was immensely happy that he had decided to visit their humble house. Naturally they wanted to lavish hospitality on him. But, alas, they had not a grain of rice in their house that day. The wife returned empty handed from their neighbours' too.

U Shing was devastated by this humiliation. He had nothing whatsoever to offer to his guest. So he took a dagger and stabbed himself to death. His wife was horrified and grief stricken and soon followed her husband to death.



Meanwhile, U Nik Mahajon had a strange sense of premonition. He had a funny feeling in the pit of his stomach. He went into the house and was stunned to find the two dead bodies of his closest friends lying in a pool of blood. On one side a pot of water was simmering. He realised why his friends had taken their lives. "My friends, they loved me so much that they died for me. Why should I continue to live?" U Nik Mahajon thought to himself. He took the same dagger and stabbed himself.

On that very night, a thief who was being chased by villagers from a neighbouring hill saw this house, and finding the door open, sneaked in. He curled up in the darkness and soon fell fast asleep. The next morning when he woke up, he saw, lo and behold, those three dead bodies! What should he

possibly do? The villagers were still all around guarding the area and if they caught him and then discovered those three dead bodies...well, this was a fate worse than death. They would think he did it! Panic gripped him, his heart beat faster and faster...there was no choice...he picked up the dagger and stabbed himself. Better to die this way rather than at the hands of the violent mob...

When the villagers finally came to know of this whole unfortunate tragedy where four lives were taken, and then the actual cause of it, they prayed to their God. Oh God, surely there must

be a way in which a person can feel happy when their guests arrive. They must have something to offer them...or they will feel ever so small and humiliated.

Their God heard them and thus came into existence the betel leaf, nut, lime and tobacco. Even the poorest of the poor can afford these and have something to offer to their guests if not a cup of tea.

The betel nut symbolises U Nik Mahajan, the betel leaf and lime applied on it the couple and the tobacco, the thief, is placed in the corner of the mouth.

In Meghalaya, to this day, the chewing of betel nut and leaf is considered more noble courtesy than a habit. It is always offered to guests...and one fondly hopes that the guest is a chewer of betel leaf! □

*Angela Paswet works with the Commandant, Assam Regiment Centre in Shillong. She has taught in St. Mary's School, Gauhati and the Little Flower School, Dibrugarh.*

## Truth Will Out (Kannada)

*Retold by Tara Srinivas*

*This is a story from the ancient kingdom of the Hoysalas. There are many myths that came from this kingdom, or more appropriately, this principality ruled by the Hoysala chief, Ballala the First, who for some reason had established two capitals, one at Belur (also called Velapuri), and the other at Dvarasamudra, the 'door to the ocean', now known as Halebid. Shortly after 1106 A.D, Ballala I was succeeded by his younger brother Bittideva, who laid the foundation for the greatness of this dynasty. Our story belongs to this period in Hoysala history.*



**T**he legend goes that Bittideva, younger brother of Ballala I, was very lucky in love and had many beautiful and talented queens as wives. His favourite, however, was Queen Shantala, who it is said, was all grace and wisdom. All was not well though in the king's harem, as one of his queens had a severe mental problem. Today, in this century, it would perhaps have been called schizophrenia. This was a constant source of worry to all in the palace.

It was at this time that Ramanujacharya came to the shores of Dvarasamudra preaching his Vaishnavism. The Vaishnavite's dharma was to relieve suffering wherever they saw it. So, true to his dharma, Ramanuja cured the queen of her chronic ailment much to the delight of King Bittideva who promptly renamed



himself Vishnuvardhana. Queen Shantala, however, seems to have retained Jainism as her faith. Vishnuvardhana, happy in his new faith, wanted to build a Vishnu temple in his kingdom with the help of the best architect-sculptor guild of his times called the Jakanacharis, still remembered under the name of 'Deccan Sculptors'. And so he vowed to build the most beautiful and perfect Chennakesava temple at Velapuri and install in the sanctum sanctorum the consecrated carving of the monolithic 'Chennakesava'.

So the whole kingdom was abuzz with activity....workers, architects, sculptors, masons, models, assistants...were all rounded up in the service of the kingdom and work started. The head of the Jakanachari guild started work on the main carving of Chennakesava as a monolithic deity. He chose the right stone, the right colour, and on the auspicious day, began to work on the main deity after prayers. Six months later the deity was ready to be consecrated...a most perfectly proportioned figure with majestic mien and lotus eyes, with a shining polished crown on its head, the limbs flowing and supple and the feet well implanted on the pedestal.

The day of the consecration drew near and the king and all his queens were excited. It was at this time that Jakanacharya's son returned from a journey that had taken him away to a far kingdom where he had gone to study their sculpture styles. A humble lad not given to much laughter or talk, but possessed of a face with an open countenance and a certain sense of joy in his eyes, this boy was considered to be the heir apparent to

the Jakanachari guild.

The son was taken to the icon that his father had created and he was struck by the beauty of Chennakeshava. Suddenly he drew in his breath sharply. There was a darkness in the stomach area of the idol that was carved from a monolithic rock, as happens when water wets the stone. He looked very thoughtful and very sad. His father who was watching him asked him what was wrong.

The son looked at him and with some sort of deep inner courage stated that this idol could not be consecrated because it had an inherent flaw in it. That a small frog in a little water would be found inside the rock in the stomach area and therefore this idol was unworthy of worship. The father's face grew red and livid and he started trembling all over, but the young son stood his ground and looked very sad as if waiting for the inevitable to fall upon him. Soon a crowd began to gather to witness the argument between father and son. Even King Vishnuvardhana came to join them at the temple site. There was a hushed silence.

The father pronounced a terrible test. He said that the idol would be broken open at the stomach, and if there was

a hollow in the rock, he would cut off his right hand at the site of the consecration. If there was no hollow then the son would have to do the same. Both agreed in the presence of the king.

The masons broke open the idol at the stomach. A frog jumped out of the stomach of the sculpture. The father cut off his right hand. And it is said that he went off into the forest for long years of penance.

The son takes on the responsibility of carving the new icon of Vishnu and with others from the guild of the Jakanacharis, completes the sculpture, the myth reassures us. It has since been called Vijayanarayana and is placed at the main temple of Belur. The statue of *kappe* (frog in Kannada) Chennigaraya still stands in the compound of the Vijayanagara temple, where, even today, no sacrament or worship is accorded to this deity. But it stands as a sym-



There is a myth behind the name of the Hoysala Dynasty. It is said that long ago in a Rishi *ashram* in Angadi, run by a well-revered Rishi, there were many princes and sons of the nobility to learn the techniques and philosophy of the Kshatriya *dharma*. Sala was one of the princelings who was there to complete his credits in this prestigious *ashram*.

This *ashram*, in the deep forest, was once attacked by a fierce tiger. The guru, who was in deep meditation became intuitively aware of the tiger and shouted "Hoy Sala!" (Hoy is to kill in old Kannada).

Sala, the disciple killed the tiger in one fell swoop with a sword. Sala's descendants came to be known as the Hoysalas. Even today, as if to freeze the myth in stone, there is a sculpture of a young boy killing a tiger in front of the temple at Halebidu. And Angadi is still on the district map of the wooded Chikkagalur District as a village in the Mudigere taluk of Karnataka.

bol of truth that was not given up even when the contesting parties were as close as father and son and there was a terrible price to pay. The truth then that morning, long long ago in a little kingdom of the Hoysalas, was stated with deep conviction and it was taken with the bold courage of acceptance.

It is a tale few young people in the land of the Hoysalas ever forgot.

*Tara Srinivas is a consultant with the Education Unit of a donor development agency called ACTIONAID. Earlier she was with the National Drinking Water Mission, and also with the Elementary Education Division in the Dept. Of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development, New Delhi. Tara lives in Madras.*

*Illustrations: Oron Das*

#### KEEP THE MYTH ALIVE DEPARTMENT

Yes, keep it alive! Surely you must have at least one myth or folklore (from your parts) which you are dying to share with us. Then, just type it out neatly and send it in to us. Just remember that the myth should have a local flavour and if it has some connection to something identifiable in the contemporary world, so much the better. And, by the way, we are not exactly looking out for fairy tales.

Send your piece/s to:

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# HONOUR

*Ashapoorna Devi*

*Ashapoorna Devi, to whom this issue of THE EYE is dedicated, knew her Calcutta well. She plunges into the nondescript world of domestic servitude—the world of the 'cleaning ladies' within the sprawling metropolis. They come and go, unable to treat any of their surrogate houses as their own. Who are these peripheral shadows working backstage to keep our lives running? Do they have any rights or are they forever doomed to live off the charity of their employers? The protagonists here are engaged in a banal drama. Yet, it flows in the best tradition of story telling. Someone has to have the last say. Who does?*

**T**hough she said, "She's going on fifteen", her daughter did not look it. She was somewhere between seventeen and eighteen. Maid servants, thought Sumitra, are accustomed to concealing the age of their daughters.

In which slum was this girl reared, Sumitra asked herself. Where did she get this healthy glow, this unparalleled beauty, unimaginable in slum dwellers?

She could not hide her surprise.

"Your daughter's really beautiful, Basanti", she said. "She doesn't look like your daughter, really."

"Everyone over there talked no end about her beauty", Basanti said, smiling. Sumitra perceived a tinge of pride in that smile. "She took after her father, Baudi. Her father was really handsome. When he died of snakebite, my mother-in-law blamed it on me and started torturing me. I was unable to bear it, so I left the house with my daughter to live in this slum. I told my mother-in-law that I would toil to earn my own living, if that brightened her face. People in our slum often used



to ask me if I had stolen this girl from a gentle family. They couldn't be blamed for they had not seen her father."

Sumitra smiled. "I think so too", she said. "You have been with me for so long, but you never cared to bring

her to me."

Basanti's face, full of smiles and pride, paled.

"I used to take her with me when she was a child", she said "and she would help me in my work. When she grew up she felt shy going to gentlemen's houses, so I'd leave her at home. But now I have a problem leaving her alone."

She paused awhile and looked at Sumitra's face.

"If you give her shelter, Baudi, I will feel so relieved", she said.

Basanti had worked in Sumitra's house for four months when her old maid had gone home on leave. Because of her gentle and neat ways, Sumitra had not forgotten her. But to keep her daughter was a different proposition altogether and would entail many problems. Some wicked boys at the slum had been troubling Basanti's daughter.

She could not stand their leering and teasing any longer. Basanti could not stay at the slum all day to guard her. She had to go out and slog to cater to their two bellies and pay the rent.

Just two months back fate had smiled on her. She got a job that consisted of looking after a rich old woman for seventy rupees a month, a generous sum indeed. She was entitled to free meals, oil, soap, betel, dried tobacco and tea. Paralysed with rheumatism though she was, the old woman was given to luxury. She had to be bathed with perfumed soap, massaged with perfumed oil, and anointed with a rheumatism-curing oil. Her daughters-in-law had no time and energy to do all this. They had money and hence engaged Basanti.

"I was floating in the ocean of happiness, Baudi", Basanti said. "While at work, my daughter would stay the whole day with my neighbours. On my return I would take her to my room. We would share the dinner I saved from my master's house. I could save my entire salary for her marriage. But this



happiness left me soon, Baudi."

Basanti paused and heaved a deep sigh.

"God is a miser", she continued on a philosophical note. "He does not give heartily. If He gives you something, He will snatch another thing from you. He had given me happiness and now He wants to take it away from me."

"The old woman also cannot sleep. All night long, she keeps her daughters-in-law up with odd jobs. She'll say, 'Switch on the light, switch off the fan; switch off the light, switch on the fan'. Or 'Pound a betel leaf'. If they delay, she scolds them. Her sons couldn't bear this new trouble. So they offered me an extra ten rupees to stay the night. But they warned me at the same time that if I did not agree, they would engage another maid. Do you understand the situation? I have already given up my other jobs which I won't get back."

Sumitra said non-committally, "It's really a problem I see".

Basanti was encouraged by the note of sympathy in Sumitra's voice.

"I have come to your door, Baudi", she said. "Now it is up to you to decide. You must give her shelter in your house."

"Why not keep your daughter in your present employer's house? They're rich. You'll watch over your daughter and your patient as well."

Basanti raised her hand to her forehead.

"Do you think I didn't tell them?" she said in an aggrieved tone. "I even

touched their feet. They have hearts of stone. They said there were already too many servants in their house. For the past two months I have been going from house to house where I've worked to find shelter for my daughter. They

beauty, this highly inflammable creature? Besides you won't stay by her.

The girl was standing in the corner of the verandah wearing a cheap striped sari and a red blouse. Even with these clothes she looked so exquisite that you felt like looking at her a second time. Sumitra's thoughts wandered, thinking how lovely the girl would look in some of her own saris. Would any of her blouses fit the girl? She wondered. Maybe she could even gift her that tin of unused talcum powder? She was filled with sympathy for the plight of this poor, lovely creature. She wanted to show her how she felt by giving her these things.

Basanti mistook her long silence for something akin to willingness.

"Should I keep her here from today onwards, Baudi?" she asked eagerly. "She will eat the left-overs of your meals and work hard. If you allow her to enter your kitchen she will cook for you."

"We won't need her to work for us", Sumitra said as if to herself. "We have just engaged a maid. How much needs to be cooked for just two souls?" She paused for a while and said, "I need to ask my husband about keeping your daughter in our house."

Basanti understood that her Baudi's heart had softened a bit and capitalised on it. "Why seek the Master's opinion? You control the household. You have no manservant or mancook. Only a maid. That's why I have made this request to you. This evening or tomorrow my daughter will bring her clothes to your house."

Then she turned to her daughter.



*A wrong move in your game of chess, Basanti, Sumitra mused. If people had perhaps not seen your daughter, they may have agreed to keep her. Who would keep this beauty, this highly inflammable creature? Besides you won't stay by her.*

have all refused on some pretext or the other. I am taking her with me wherever I go hoping that someone would take pity on her."

A wrong move in your game of chess, Basanti, Sumitra mused. If people had perhaps not seen your daughter, they may have agreed to keep her. Who would keep this

*"I don't wear blinds like you. Calcutta is teeming with scoundrels and cheats. But do you keep yourself informed? You will see this very girl drop her pretence of gentleness and lie that we are keeping her against her will. She will even sue you in court".*

"Come on and pay obeisance to your aunt. You'll stay here until you go to your father-in-law's house. Help her with all her chores."

Sumitra hesitated, "Will she stay with me? But...."

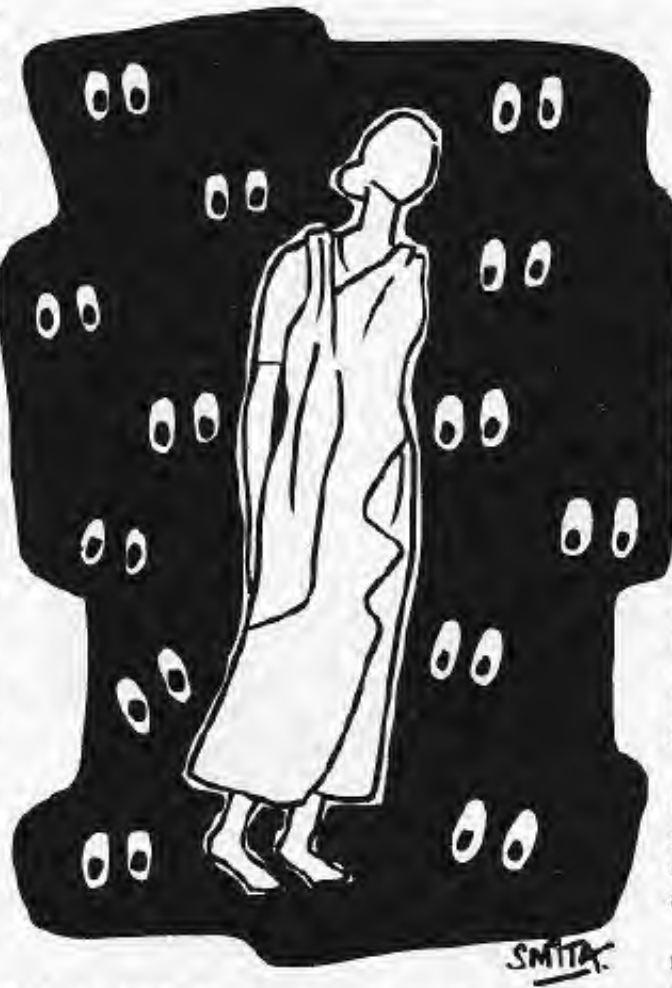
Basanti interrupted her. "No but, Baudi. Will she not stay with you? She has been scared of those wicked boys over the years. They whistle at her and sing obscene songs. They often brush against her when she goes to the tubewell to fetch water. And there are many other things I can't even talk about".

Sumitra's face paled.

Basanti dabbed tears from her eyes with the edge of her sari.

"Now you know why I'm requesting you to give her shelter", she sobbed. "We may be poor, but we too have our honour. You are an educated woman. You know how we value our honour. Now you have to safeguard the honour of my daughter".

Sumitra felt her heart pounding. Snakes were hissing over the girl's head. A mother was asking her to protect the honour of her helpless daughter. Could she say to her, "Why are you dumping your daughter on me? It's your problem, not mine". No, Sumitra could not say this. Basanti looked the picture of happiness. She even touched Sumitra's feet. "You are the Goddess incarnate. I went to many houses but no one gave ear to my plea". She paused and hesitated, "Can I leave



her with you for the time being, Baudi? I shall come in the evening to take her. Tomorrow morning I shall bring her here with her clothes".

Sumitra agreed. Basanti went away, bubbling with happiness.

"I won't keep this girl in need of clothes", thought Sumitra. Then she set herself to selecting saris and blouses. "Perhaps I could even educate her?", she thought, oblivious of her own position.

But of her position, Mahitosh was only too well aware.

"You've given her word", he said,

when, on his return from office he heard the whole thing. "You didn't think it necessary to take my permission"?

Sumitra was embarrassed.

"She was literally pleading with me", she replied.

"Why won't she plead", Mahitosh said angrily. "They'll do just about everything, even lick the dust of your feet in order to get their way. But, me, I won't take on the responsibility, mind you".

"The girl can't carry on in the slum", Sumitra said, a little forcefully, "because she's a good and gentle girl. Were she of easy virtue, she would have gone astray. Knowing all this should I leave her to the wolves"?

"Many things happen in this world, don't they? Can you take responsibility for everything?" Mahitosh asked.

"No, but we can surely take on the responsibility of one person if we wish to".

Sumitra said.

"Don't romanticise her problems", Mahitosh said, somewhat agitated.

"I've seen her. Do you think this low class girl has kept herself chaste?"

Sumitra flew into a rage. "Why do you use terms like 'low class people'? If the girl was not innocent why would her mother beg us to protect her?"

"Maybe she has some designs behind her begging", Mahitosh said.

"What could it possibly be?" Sumitra said, lowering her voice. "If you'd heard

all the things she told me, you couldn't have said no to her. Those boys teased her so much, she wanted to hang herself".

"Why did her mother then have to take up a charwoman's job in someone's house?" Mahitosh mocked.

"Everyone needs money, especially the poor. She is saving money for her daughter's marriage".

"Does she need thousands of rupees for that?" Sarcasm dripped from his tone.

Sumitra could not abide the fact that Mahitosh always humiliated the poor.

"We needn't talk about the marriage", she said sternly. "Even if she could, how long can she guard her against those boys? Has she that kind of power or strength? What if they will snatch her daughter away?"

Contempt was written large over Mahitosh's face.

"She has said enough to melt the heart of her Baudi, I see. You'd better not pay any heed to her. They are very clever in fabricating stories. They can foist their daughters on you with their heart-rending words and then call in the police on the charge that you have abducted them. Have you thought of this possibility?"

Sumitra was puzzled. "You're no better than them. What an imagination you have!"

"I don't wear blinds like you. Calcutta is teeming with scoundrels and cheats. But do you keep yourself informed? You will see this very girl drop her pretence of gentleness and lie that we are keeping her against her will. She will sue you in court".

"For what possible benefit, may I ask?" Sumitra's voice was shrill.

Mahitosh burst into peals of laughter. "For money, what else? Maybe the wicked boys are her accomplices. They will flock around our house and raise a commotion.

No, no, it's impossible to keep the girl. When she comes here in the evening to take her back tell her that I am not for it."

Sumitra's eyes were rivetted on Mahitosh's face. "Which means I have to acknowledge to the charwoman that I have no say in the family?"

Mahitosh ignored this. He said coldly, "You're worried about lowering your image in front of that woman? That's really strange! Give up the poetry and try to be practical. What would you do if what I said really did happen?"

"Suppose what the charwoman said proved to be true?" Sumitra counter questioned.

"Her daughter's safety is her business", he said. "Why doesn't she ask the slum dwellers for help?"

"Then you're saying that if she tipped off the slum dwellers, they would take on the responsibility of the girl?"

"Why not?" Mahitosh said enthusiastically. "All men are not bad. There are family men in the slums living with their children. If they all unite they can easily teach those wicked boys a good lesson".

"Do you think the people in the slums have more humanity and power than you?" Sumitra said mockingly.

"I won't react to your mocking", Mahitosh said. The fact remains I will not shelter the beautiful daughter of your Basanti. I'm willing to concede that your Basanti and her daughter are not cheats. But she could still bring scandal to this family if she gets an opportunity".

Sumitra's lips curved. "How", she asked derisively. "We have no manservant here for her to flirt with".

Mahitosh burst into boisterous laughter. "Maybe she'll flirt with her master! She has such beauty as can turn one's head!"

"Then I'll have to take her on to judge whether I have been living with gold or brass." The look on Sumitra's face was still derisive.

The laughter turned into anger. "Stop talking nonsense", Mahitosh said. "When she comes tell her that we can't afford to keep her daughter".

"I can't", Sumitra declared. "I've given her my word".

"You didn't consider your position then." Mahitosh said sharply. "You were influenced by her tale of woe. Now you are sticking to your word. Alright, I'll talk to her myself".

From inside her room, Sumitra listened to Mahitosh talking to Basanti. She heard Basanti's plaintive, hoarse voice, "Please allow me to talk to Baudi, Babu. She understands my problem".

"Your Baudi has got a headache", Mahitosh was saying. "She's resting".

"Let me go near the door", Basanti said. "She gave me hope and she won't disappoint me".

"Don't disturb her", Mahitosh was abrupt. "She's got a very bad headache. She cannot raise her head".

Sumitra heard her sobs. After a while she heard another sharp feminine voice.

"Stop crying, Ma", the voice was saying. "You need not cry, Baudi...Baudi. I know now who holds the reins here. Never come to touch Babu's feet for protecting the honour of your daughter. We are low class people. Let us live accordingly and look after our own problems".

Sumitra heard two pairs of feet descending the stairs.

Mahitosh slid into the room.

"Heard that?" he said gravely. "You yourself vouched for her gentle manners".

Sumitra did not answer.

She really could not raise her head. She was suffering from a serious headache caused perhaps by her inability to save the honour of the girl.

Whose honour could she not save?

That low class girl's or her own?

□

*This is an edited version of the original translation from the Bengali by Bhaskar Roy Borman.*

*Illustrations: Smita Lohia*



*One Vishnusharman shrewdly gleaming  
All wordly wisdom's inner meaning,  
In these five books the  
charm compresses  
Of all such books the world possesses.*

# Panchatantra

*It is said that an ounce of sense contained in the Panchatantra is better than a ton of scholarship. Most of us are familiar with it from our childhood as 'once-upon-a-time' stories and have read them in abridged forms or in comics. Rarely have we encountered a literal translation in verse form. Indeed, these wise verses, often epigrammatic in style, go to make the real character of the Panchatantra. The stories are charming when regarded as pure narrative, but it is the beauty, wisdom and wit of the verses which lift the Panchatantra above the best story books.*

*The Panchatantra is a 'niti shastra' or textbook of 'niti'. The word 'niti' roughly means the 'wise conduct of life'. It is witty, mischievous and profoundly sane. The word, 'Panchatantra' means, the 'Five Books', the 'Pentateuch'. Each of the five books are independent, consisting of a framing story with numerous, inserted stories, told by one or another of the characters of the main narrative. The device of the framing story is familiar in oriental works, as in the Arabian Nights. The large majority of the actors are animals, who have, of course, a fairly constant character. Thus, the lion is strong, but dull of wit, the jackal, crafty, the heron stupid, the cat, a hypocrite. The animal actors present far more vividly and shrewdly, undeceived and free of all sentimentality, a view, that piercing the humbug of every false ideal, reveals with incomparable wit, the sources of lasting joy. And this is how it happened..*

**I**n the southern country is a city called Maiden's Delight. There lived a king named Immortal Power. He was familiar with all the works dealing with the wise conduct of life. His feet were made dazzling by the tangle of rays of light

from jewels in the diadems of mighty kings who knelt before him. He had reached the far shore of all the arts that embellish life. This king had three sons. Their names were Rich-Power, Fierce-Power and Endless-Power and they were supreme block-heads.

Now when the king perceived that they were hostile to education, he summoned his counsellors and said. "Gentlemen, it is known to you that these sons of mine, being hostile to education, are lacking in discernment. So when I behold them, my kingdom brings me no happiness, though all external thorns are drawn. For there is wisdom in the proverb:

*Of sons unborn, or dead, or fools,  
Unborn or dead will do;  
They cause a little grief, no doubt;  
But fools, a long life through*

and again:

*To what good purpose can a cow  
That brings no calf nor milk be bent?  
Or why beget a son who proves  
A dunce and disobedient?*

Some means must therefore be devised to awaken their intelligence."

And they, one after another, replied, "O King, first one learns grammar, in twelve years. If this subject has somehow been mastered, then one masters the books on religion and practical life. Then the intelligence awakens."

But one of their number, a counsellor named Keen said: "O King, the duration of life is limited, and the verbal sciences require much time for mastery. Therefore let some kind of epitome be devised to wake their intelligence. There is a proverb that says:

*Since verbal sciences have  
no final end,  
Since life is short, and  
obstacles impend,  
Let central facts be picked and  
firmly fixed  
As swans extract the milk  
with water mixed.*

"Now, there is a Brahmin here named Vishnusharman, with a reputation for competence in numerous sciences. Entrust the princes to him. He will certainly make them intelligent in

a twinkling.

When the king had listened to this, he summoned Vishnusharman and said, "Holy sir, as a favour to me you must make these princes incomparable masters of the art of practical life. In return, I will bestow upon you a hundred land grants."

And Vishnusharman made this answer to the king, "O king, listen. Here is the plain truth. I am not the man to sell good learning for a hundred land grants. But if I do not, in six month's time, make the boys acquainted with the art of intelligent living, I will give up my own name. Let us cut the matter short. Listen to my lion roar. My boasting arises from no greed for cash. Besides, I have no use for money; I am eighty years old, and all the objects of sensual desire have lost their charm. But in order that your request may be granted, I will show a sporting spirit with reference to artistic matters. Make a note of the date. If I fail to render your sons, in six month's time, incomparable masters of the art of intelligent living, then His Majesty is at liberty to show me His Majestic bare bottom."

When the king, surrounded by his counsellors, had listened to the Brahmin's highly unconventional promise, he was dumbstruck. He entrusted the princes to him, and experienced supreme content.

Meanwhile, Vishnusharman took the boys, went home, and made them learn by heart, five books which he composed and called

- (i) *The Loss of Friends*
- (ii) *The Winning of Friends*
- (iii) *Crows and Owls*
- (iv) *Loss of Gains*
- (v) *Ill-considered Action.*

These the princes learned, and in six month's time they answered the prescription. Since that day this work on the art of intelligent living, called *Panchatantra*, or the *Five Books*, has travelled the world, animating at awakening the intelligence in the young.

## The Story of The Last Episode.....

Victor the Jackal's relentless scheming, to create a rift between his master Rusty the Lion and Lively the Bull, began to pay off. Lively was now convinced that his very life was endangered. False friends and their untimely action could result in disastrous consequences, said he, as in the case of Passion the king-swan. Passion, who sincerely befriended an owl, was invited by the latter to visit his home. But when he did visit the owl's home by a lake, he found the latter unwilling to meet with him during the day, when the owl was blind. Passion had to wait till night to exchange pleasantries, after which he fell asleep near the owl's hole, tired by the journey and the long wait all day.

When the sun rose next morning, a conch sounded across the lake, the signal of a commercial caravan readying to depart after a night's encamp-

ment at the lake. The careless owl answered this with a loud hoot and promptly dived into a hole for safety. But the leader of the caravan, taking this to be an ill omen, ordered his archer, who could aim by sound. Alas, his arrow found its mark and killed poor Passion who lay sleeping near the owl's nest.

Rueing his friendship with Rusty, Lively ruminated sadly on how he had fallen for the lion's show of warmth and hospitality. Even more convinced now of his folly in pursuing this friendship, he concluded his own argument.

*All who live upon their wits  
Many learned too, are mean,  
Do the wrong as quick as right.  
Illustration may be seen*

And to prove his point, Lively narrated the story of:

**UGLY'S TRUST ABUSED.**

## UGLY'S TRUST ABUSED



In a certain city lived a merchant named Ocean, who loaded a hundred camels

with valuable cloth and set out in a certain direction. Now one of his camels, whose name was Ugly, was overburdened and fell limp, with every limb relaxed. Then the merchant divided the pack of cloth, loaded it on other camels, and because he found

himself in a wild forest region where delay was impossible, he proceeded, leaving Ugly behind.

When the trader was gone, Ugly hobbled about and began to crop the grass. Thus in a very few days the poor fellow regained his strength.

In that forest lived a lion whose name was Haughty, who had as hangers-on, a leopard, a crow, and a jackal. As they roamed the forest, they encountered the abandoned camel, and the lion said, after observing his fantastic and comical shape: "This is an exotic in our forest. Ask him what

he is." So the crow informed himself of the facts and said: "This is what goes by the name of camel in the world." Thereupon the lion asked him: "My good friend, where did you come from?" And the camel gave precise details of his separation from the trader, so that the lion experienced compassion and guaranteed his personal security.

In this posture of affairs, the lion fought an elephant one day, received a thrust from a tusk, and had to keep his cave. And when five or six days had passed, they all found themselves in urgent distress from the failure of food. So the lion, observing how they dropped, said to them: "I am crippled by this wound and cannot supply you with the usual food. You will just have to make an effort on your own account."

And they replied: "Why should we care to thrive, while our lord and king is in this state?" "Bravo!" said the lion. "You show the conduct and devotion of good servants. Round up some food-animals for me while I am in this condition." Then, when they made no answer, he said to them: "Come! Do not be bashful. Hunt up some creature. Even in my present condition I will convert it into food for you and myself."

So the four started to roam the woods. Since they found no food-animals, the

crow and the jackal conferred together and the jackal said: "Friend crow, why roam about? Here is Ugly, who trusts our king. Let us provide for our sustenance by killing him."

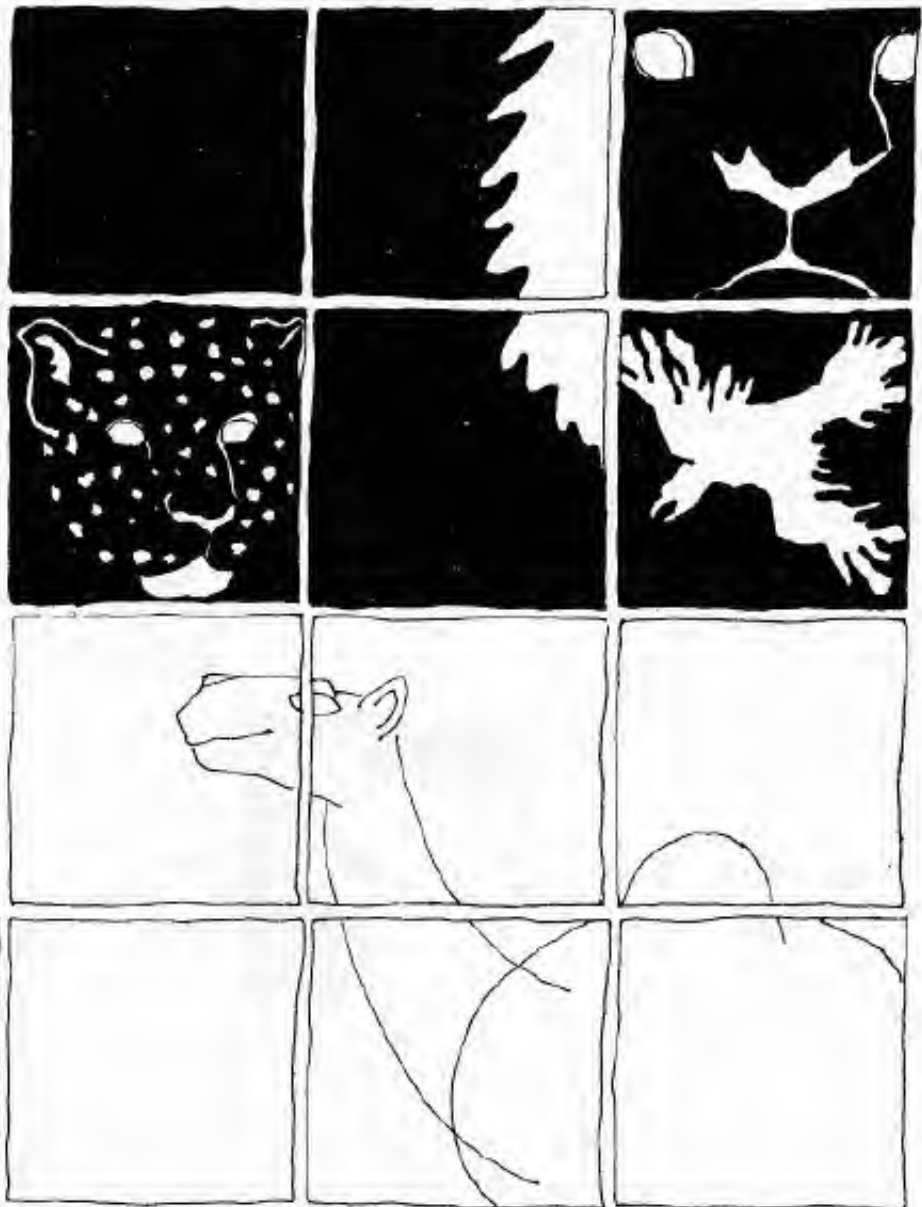
"A very good suggestion," said the crow. "But after all, the master guaranteed his personal security, and so cannot kill him."

"Quite so," said the jackal. "I will interview the master and make him think of killing Ugly. Stay right here

until I go home and return with the master's answer." With this he hastened to the master.

When he found the lion, he said: "Master, we have roamed the entire forest, and are now too famished to stir a foot. Besides, the king is on a diet. So, if the king commands, one might fortify one's health today by means of Ugly's flesh."

When the lion had listened to this ruthless proposal, he cried out angrily:





"Shame upon you, most degraded of sinners! The moment you repeat those words, I will strike you dead. Why, I guaranteed his personal security. How can I kill him with my own paw? You have heard the saying:

*The wise declare and understand  
No gift of cow or food or land  
To be among all gifts as grand  
As safety granted on demand."*

"Master," replied the jackal, "If you kill him after guaranteeing his safety, then you are indeed blameworthy. If, however, of his own accord he devotedly offers his own life to his lord and king, then no blame attaches. So you may kill him on condition that he voluntarily destines himself to slaughter. Otherwise, pray eat one or another of the rest of us. For the king is on a diet, and if food fails, he will experience a change for the worse. In that case, what value have these lives of ours, which will no longer be spent in our master's service? If anything disagreeable happens to our gracious master, then we must follow him into the fire. For the proverb says:

*Save the chieftain of the clan,  
Whatsoe'er the pain;  
Lose him, and the clan is lost:  
Hubless spokes are vain."*

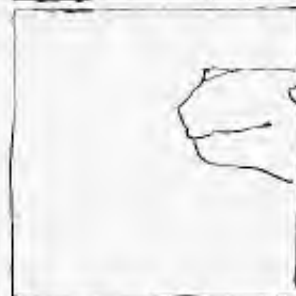
After listening to this, Haughty said: "Very well. Do as you will."

With this message the jackal hastened to say to the others: "Well, friends, the master is very low. The life is oozing from the tip of his nose. If he goes, who will be our protector in this forest? So, since starvation is driving him toward the other world, let us go and voluntarily offer our own bodies. Thus we shall pay the debt we owe our gracious master. And the proverb says:

*Servants, when disaster  
Comes upon their master,  
If alive and well  
Tread the road to hell."*

So they all went, their eyes brimming with tears, bowed low before Haughty, and sat down.

On seeing them, Haughty said: "My friends, did you catch any creature, or see any?" And the crow replied: "Master, though we roamed everywhere, we still did not catch any creature, nor see any. Master, pray eat me and support your life for a day. Thus the master will be replete, while



I shall rise to heaven. For the saying goes:

*A servant who, in loyal love,  
Has yielded up his breath,  
Adorns a lofty seat in heaven,  
Secure from age and death."*

On hearing this, the jackal said: "Your body is small. If he ate you, the master would scarcely prolong his life. Besides, there is a moral objection. For the verse tells us:

*Crows' flesh and such small leavings  
Are things to be passed by:  
Why eat an evil somewhat  
That does not satisfy?"*

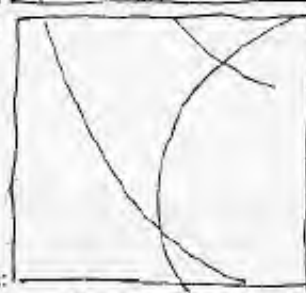
"You have shown your loyalty, and have won a saintly reputation in both worlds. Now make way, while I address the master." So the jackal bowed

respectfully and said: "Master, pray use my body to support your life today, thus conferring on me the best of earth and heaven."

Hearing this, the leopard said: "Very praiseworthy, indeed, my friend. However, your body is rather small, too. Besides, he ought not to eat you, since you belong to the same unguipugnacious family. You know the proverb:

*The prudent though with life at stake,  
Avoid forbidden food  
(Too small at that)--from fear to lose  
Both earth's and heaven's good."*

Well, you have shown yourself a loyal servant. There is truth in the stanza:



*That swarms of gentlemen delight  
A monarch, is not strange,  
Since, first and last and times  
between."*

*Their honor does not change,  
Make way, then, so that I, too, may  
win the master's grace."*

Thereupon the leopard bowed low and said: "Master, pray prolong your life for a day at the cost of my life. Grant me an everlasting home in heaven, and spread my fame afar on earth. Pray show no hesitation. For the

proverb says:

*A servant who, by loyal love,  
Has demonstrated worth,  
Attains a lasting home above  
And glory on the earth.*

Hearing this, poor Ugly thought: "Well, they used the most elegant phrases. Yet the master did not kill a single one of them. So I, too, will make a speech befitting the occasion. I have no doubt that all three will contradict me."

Having come to this conclusion, he said: "Very admirable, friend leopard. But you too are unguipugnacious. How, then, can the master eat you? There is a proverb to fit the case:

*The mere imagining of wrongs  
To kinsmen done, confirms  
The loss of earth and heaven. Such  
rogues  
Turn into unclean worms.*

Make way, then, so that I, too, may address the master." So poor Ugly stood in the presence, bowed low and said "Master, these you surely may not eat. Pray prolong your life by means of my life, so that I may win the best of earth and heaven. For the proverb says:

*No sacrificer and no saint  
Can ever rise as high  
As do the simple servingfolk  
Who for the master die.*

Hereupon the lion gave the word, the leopard and the jackal tore his body, the crow pecked out his eyes, poor Ugly yielded up the ghost, and all the others ravenously devoured him.

And that is why I say:  
*All who live upon their wits,...*  
and the rest of it.

After telling the story, Lively continued, addressing Victor: "My dear fellow, this king, with his shabby advisers, brings no good to his dependents. Better have as king a vulture advised by swans than a swan advised by vultures. For from the vulture advisers many vices appear in their master, quite sufficient to bring ruin. Of the two, therefore, one should choose the former as king. But a king instigated by evil counsel is incapable of reflection. You know the saying:

*Your jackal does not reassure:  
Your crow's sharp bill offends:  
You therefore see me up a tree—  
I do not like your friends.*



"How was that?" asked Victor. And Lively told the story of

### THE LION AND THE CARPENTER

(To be Continued.....) □

*In 1924, Arthur W. Ryder, the well known American oriental scholar translated the Panchatantra from Sanskrit to English. It is one of the best of existing translations in any foreign language. The text here translated, dates back from the year 1199 A.D. We are happy to serialise and present the Panchatantra, interspersing verse and prose as translated by Ryder and published by Jaico. Illustrations: Oron.*

## A SPACE OF YOUR OWN....

*Got something on your mind? Want to let off steam? Or do you just like to write for the sheer fun of it? THE EYE would love to hear from you. It could be a solitude-musing, a humorous anecdote, l'affaire de coeur, an insightful experience or a long drawn out sigh. It could be sheer fantasy or frill-less, gut-searing truth. That's quite a long rope, isn't it? So get out that pen-and-paper or taperecorder or laptop and give in to inspiration. We're waiting to hear from you.*



**- Total adult literacy and universal primary education by 1998**

**For the right to know  
For the right to choose  
To tell enemies from friends  
To know how the fire is born  
To learn how birds fly**



**Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, Madhya Pradesh**





**Ashish  
Khokar**

"Rukmini.....  
Rukmini....." runs  
the song from a  
popular film and my

mind (whatever's left of it) goes to Rukmini, the editor of this magazine who is concerned that India may go the Thai way. She visited the land of the Thais recently as a 'nobody...neither a businesswoman, shopper or Patpong junkie' and saw first hand what 'those Americans' have done to its culture. 'Everything is for sale. The same will happen to India'.

Stupid and near senile as I am, I disagree and take recourse to that age old phrase — India is a great country. Look, it has survived everything, all kinds of species (read politicians), people (read *tandoori* loving cannibals a la Sushil Sharma) and itself! Actually, in a manner of speaking, we are Teflon coated, more, in fact than Ronald Reagan himself.

Teflon is a combination of sulphuric petroxide and hemiditis axolisis with a covering of absorbale, non-toxic, non-poisonous, non-everything something. This chemical compound was 'industrialised' (read commercially utilised) in the early eighties, coinciding with Reaganomics. What in the world is that? To put it simply, it's all-proof, nothing sticks. Only the grease on the palms of the friendly upper division clerk sticks. Over to Sudhankararendranath Chattopadhyaya who will elaborate on the subject.

We all know what it all means — money and Mani says he. That is what the world is about today. Money. That is what economics is all about, no matter what you call it — Reaganomics or Manmohanomics. India is indebted (in more ways than one) to the bald eagle, and one wonders if all this liberalisation is more show than substance. *Mera Bharat Mahaan* is becoming 'tefloned' — just nothing

can touch, alter, affect or change its current recipe unless someone *tandoors* it.

Tandoor. A food delight becomes a nightmare for the denizens of Delhi. All because a humble, devoted, righteous, diligent, pious, committed and saintly Sushil Sharma, decided to have a non-vegetarian feast. Unfortunately for his wife, mistress,

# 10<sup>©</sup> SQUINT

*A column inspired by a school of ancient Greek philosophers founded by Antisthenes, popularly known as the School of Cynics. THE EYE will place, amidst bundles of hope and idealism, one such cynic who will bash at... everything. We hope this column appeals to the diehard cynic who woke up in the morning, stubbed his toe and hated the world. The writer's views (which are expressed in a rather humorous tone) are his own (although we secretly agree with most of them).*

lover or whatever, it was her that he decided to cook as a frontier speciality or more aptly, cannibal speciality. Served to the ever-hungry-for-publicity Delhi police, relished by the CBI and put in the cold storage by an assortment of political leaders.

National or notional politicians need to polish up their acts. Look at them. Mayawati. With barely forty plus seats in an assembly of 350, this Inderpuri gal gets to be the Chief Minister of the most populous state of India, U.P., sending most ex CMs running to parliament when they get time off from painting crows, selling it to the Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay, blaming this recognition on his friends and waxes poetic. Recognise him? VP Singh, who else?

This same Mayawati sends two of my IAS friends scuttling for cover. One, a Rajput (please note caste factor) and the other a middle class Delhi-Univ-IAS-aspirant-prototype; both escape by getting themselves posted to Delhi. Better to be small fish in a big pond than drown in the senseless ocean of U.P. politics.

Actually, we as a nation, are presiding over senseless matters. Nothing matters. Ultimately it is whom you know and not what you know that counts. Those who have come to terms with this great truth early in their lives are bright. Those who have not are tubelights (don't believe the ads, tubelights are tubelights). If we deal with these little occupational hazards, we are an honourable nation. Enron enran with almost half the nation and we waited and watched for pen to touch paper. And, does anyone remember Bofors? Inflation has numbed our senses, so that in ten short years, the princely sum of sixty crores sounds paltry.

Education, ah! Getting admissions for children is a game which should be entered in the Olympics. Many parents

will win gold medals. What actually is going on is an uneducated response to the population crisis. Is there any point then talking about ration cards, gas cylinders, telephone connections (to the politician via the bureaucrat), school seats etc? Is there no end in sight? And talking of education, they give an honorary doctorate to the Minister for Environment. A theory doing the rounds is that a certain head of a forestry institute is buying himself an extension thus. The case of the selection of a principal for the Hindu College, in New Delhi, born during the days of the Independence Struggle is in the grim vortex of counter productive

politics. Professional courses are being manned by unprofessional attitudes everywhere. What will emerge? Doctors who do not know which organs to operate, lawyers who are liars and engineers whose bridges collapse.

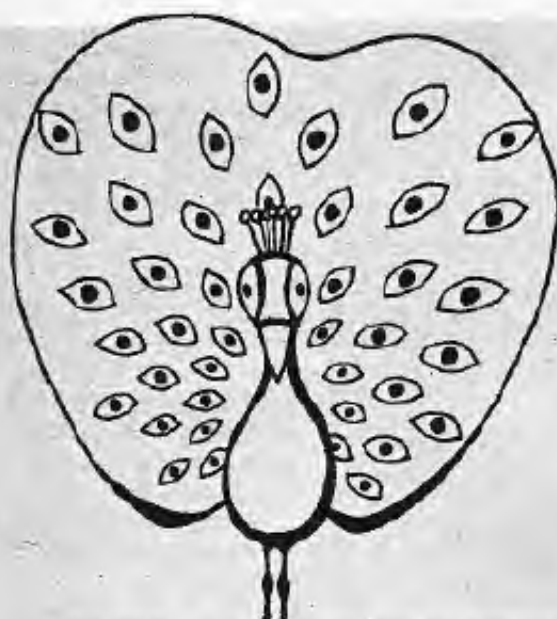
Do you know that land prices in Delhi are almost double that of New York? That all the privately owned gold here can clear our national debt of the last fifty years and the next hundred? India is amazing! Truly so!

A land of the lofty reduced to lofts and hoarding. Am I plainly disenchanted?

And why do I (to use a Jewish expression) *kvech* (complain) so?

Remember to look at the introduction to this column penned by Rukmini...  
Rukmini!

*Critic, commentator, photographer — Ashish Khokar served several cultural organisations like the Sahitya Kala Parishad, Festival of India and INTACH, before taking up writing full time. Presently he is the dance critic for the Times of India and a columnist for the Delhi based magazine, First City.*



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## READ AND DISCOVER SERIES

- ABC... Naturally !
- Puzzling Out Pollution
- Forest Tales
- Where's Away?

Published by:  
Centre for Environment Education

*Poornima Narayanan*

Browsing through these books, the mind wanders back to the sixties, when going to school meant clambering into a *jutkah* which clip-clopped its way leisurely through the leafy suburb of Adyar, in Madras, to a charming old school building overlooking the Adyar river. All of which seems like a fantasy now, when I watch with dismay, little children packed into autorickshaws, ramshackle buses or peculiar cage-like vehicles that wheeze their way noisily through the clamour and fumes of peak hour traffic (as for the Adyar river...hold your nose, ugh!). Pollution and the destruction of the environment didn't exist in our carefree little lives and it's a sad but eloquent commentary on our society that today, these issues must of necessity be addressed by young children, to learn from yesterday's mistakes and ensure a cleaner tomorrow.

The *Read and Discover* series is a set of four books for children on themes related to the environment and has been commissioned by SACEP (South Asian Co-operative Environment Programme) and developed by Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad.

# BOOK REVIEW

The books approach the hydra-headed problems of environmental pollution and ecological degradation through verse, tales and activities which would appeal to children over an age group of about seven to twelve years.

*ABC... Naturally !* is an alphabet book with verses and drawings about natural resources. Interspersed with concepts such as diversity and the interdependence of all living things are messages about overconsumption and exploitation of the earth's resources. Literally speaking, it's

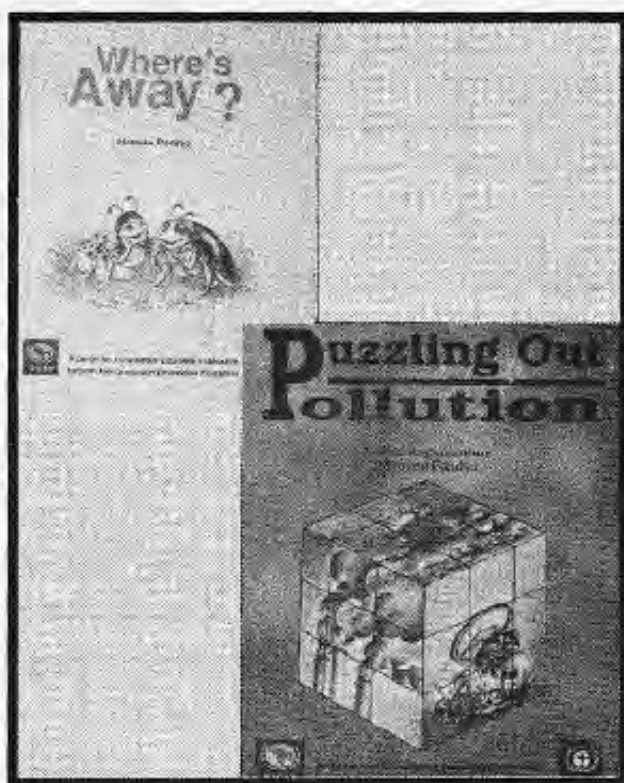
School, Anand, Gujarat.

On the garbage trail are two delightful little bugs, Worryworm and Litterbug, in *Where's Away?* The title addresses the basic problem of garbage disposal, that there is no convenient place called 'Away' where we can chuck all our muck and hope that it doesn't come back to bother us. The book teaches children the three R's of effective garbage disposal - reduce, recycle and reuse - with more concrete suggestions by way of positive action. A Home Garbage Survey Chart, for one (how many parents would score high on that, one wonders!), how to compost garbage and doing a market survey to understand how unwanted packaging accumulates. Brief articles in simple language illustrate the possibilities of recycling as in paper, aluminium and plastic products.

Folk tales and parables, sung and retold down the ages are some of the best ways to impart to children, a reverence and love for nature. *Forest Tales* is a collection of seven stories, old and new about forests and forest dwellers (the Chipko movement has its origins in one of these tales). Interspersed with the stories are brief 'lessons' such as the vital role of forests in our lives and simple techniques for planting and caring for trees. There are creative, fun-filled activities to capture the imagination of young children and foster a keen observation of nature's creations.

*Puzzling Out Pollution*, the last book, is rather more serious in tone and treatment, understandably perhaps, given the grim ugliness of

the subject. Credit must be given to the editors for the imaginative approach that has been adopted with a fine balance of facts and figures, case histories and thoughtfully designed activities and



packed with the A to Z of all that is going awry with our earth and what we can do save ourselves. The outstanding feature of this book are its illustrations by the talented students of Anandalaya



exercises that would retain a child's attention without allowing for the boredom that sets in with most of our textbooks today.

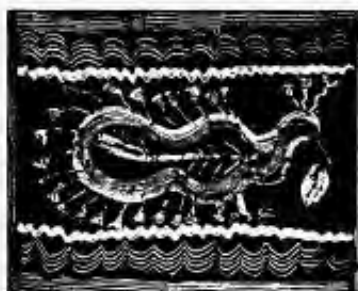
Excellent production qualities, colourful, profuse illustrations and text that is easy on the eye, while never

failing to deal with the underlying seriousness of the problem - all this and more make these books an invaluable tool for schools and concerned parents. For those who wish to order these books and know more about other publications of CEE, write to:

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## THE EYE

THE EYE is frequently connected with the Sun (and sometimes the moon) as the all-seeing eye that watches the world. The Sun is the universe's source of light and the human eyes with which we see are like the sun, lighting up the world about us. Light is itself a symbol of intelligence and spirituality, and if the sun is an eye, the eye is a corresponding sun and stands for mental and spiritual vision.

The eyes of Santa Lucia of Syracuse were invoked against blindness.  
detail from a painting by  
Francesco del Cossa

